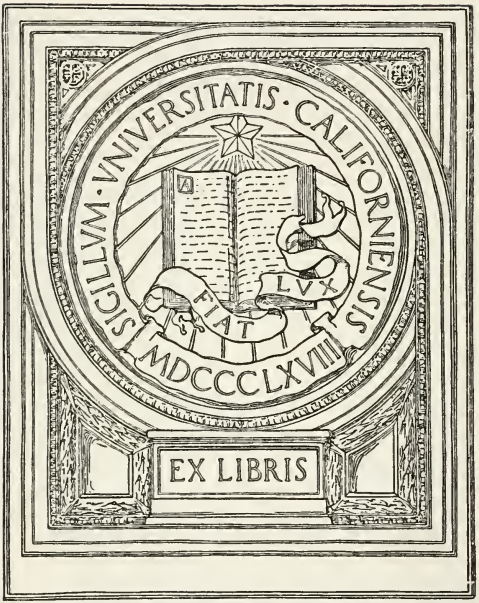
John Parmelee's Curse

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By Julian Hawthorne


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JOHN PARMELEE'S CURSE

BY

JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

AUTHOR OF "BEATRIX RANDOLPH," "DUST," "FORTUNE'S FOOL," "GARTH," "SEBASTIAN STROME," ETC., ETC.

CASSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED,
739 & 741 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

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JOHN PARMELEE'S CURSE.

I.

WHAT had become of John Parmelee? The table had been set for supper half an hour ago, and the supper itself was keeping warm in the kitchen; but John had not returned. All men are not punctual; but those who are punctual are under special obligations to maintain their reputation; and John, whatever his other faults, had the reputation of being as punctual as a pendulum.

He was now about forty-five years of age. Man and boy, he had spent his life in the little town of Tisdale. He was the son of a poor clergyman, and had attended the local school until he was fourteen. His father had cherished the ambition of sending him to college, but the good man died, and John was left mainly to his own resources.

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He was a clever and pleasant boy, somewhat inclined to fun and frolic, but honest and truthful, and possessed of a good knowledge of accounts, and aptitude for business. A friend of his father, a director of the Tisdale Bank, gave him a position as office boy in that time-honored institution. This was the beginning of John's career.

From office boy he was promoted to be junior clerk. There were five clerkships, and, one after another, John filled them all. Sometimes the promotion, sometimes the dismissal, sometimes the death of the several incumbents opened the way to the younger man's succession; but he always deserved what he got, and nobody grudged it to him. And when, at last, after fifteen years' service, he rose to the important position of cashier of the bank, every body felt it to be the proper reward of his faithful and honorable apprenticeship.

He was not only a trustworthy servant of the bank, but he was a great social favorite as well. John Parmelee had a fine musical talent, a gift of mimicry, and a sense of humor. His voice was a rich baritone, his face was winning and

handsome, his bearing manly and unpretending. As soon as you met him you began to like him, and on a better acquaintance he inspired affection. He was born to be popular, and yet he was a model of business regularity and method.

No wonder, then, that Tisdale thought highly of him. He was the soul and inspiration of the picnics, of the sociables, of the glee clubs, and of the amateur theatricals. He could imitate the leading political orators and lecturers of the day in a manner so truthful and yet so comic as to convulse his hearers with laughter. If he ascended the desk at a charity fair auction, the goods sold by his humorous and persuasive tongue brought their full value. Wherever he went mirth and good humor went with him; only at his desk in the bank was he grave and reticent. Social natures like his are apt to be weak on the side of moral principle, but Parmelee, though not a professed teetotaler, was scarce ever known to drink a glass of wine, and he smoked not more than a couple of pipes of tobacco a day. As for the darker vices, he had no trace of them.

There seemed to be only one thing necessary to complete John Parmelee's prosperity, and that was a lovely and loving wife.

For a long time, however, John himself betrayed no symptoms of feeling this deficiency. He was agreeable to all women, old or young; but to no one woman in particular. He seemed to prefer the companionship of children to that of older people, and certainly all children loved him. Impatient critics began to remark that Parmelee liked every body so well, that he would never care very much for any body.

But (as is usually the case with impatient critics) they were mistaken. John was to meet his fate like other men, and in due time the meeting took place. It was three years before John's appointment as cashier of the Tisdale Bank; he was then twenty-seven.

The affair occurred in this way: Old Judge Blackmer, a former resident of Tisdale, returned thither from the Pacific Coast, where he had gone years before for the benefit of his wife's health. Mrs. Blackmer was dead, and the judge, with his two children, came to spend his declining years in the town which gave him birth.

The children were a girl and a boy. The latter, Harold by name, was a dark complexioned, handsome, talented young fellow some twenty-one years of age, but he had not been long in Tisdale before he became known as a pretty hard character. He had all the vices that John Parmelee lacked, except that he, too, seldom drank. On the other hand, he rivaled John to some extent in his social attractiveness. He dazzled and entertained the men and fascinated the women. They had heard that he was naughty, and they were certain that he was nice. He was a dashing rider, a brilliant talker, and had any amount of cool confidence and daring. Altogether, he was a very common American type, the sort of man out of which our gamblers and adventurers are evolved.

The daughter, Sallie, resembled her brother in beauty only. In nature she was tender, sensitive and affectionate, with a certain refined and innocent sensuousness which made her shrink from all pain, mental or physical, and luxuriate in the æsthetic side of life. She was younger than Harold by two years; she adored

him as the noblest of men, and believed all the lies he told her.

The judge was disposed to be a little exclusive, and it was some months before Sallie and John Parmelee met. With John it was love at first sight, and any body might have noticed it. Upon Sallie the effect was less clearly legible. Such things sink too deeply into a woman to be easily discerned outside.

However, they met again and again. John's infatuation was a by-word in the town; and, as for Sallie, it was remarked that, if she did not love him, at any rate she showed no signs of loving any one else better.

Meanwhile, the attitude of Harold Blackmer was observed with some interest. Would he oppose the match, or would he favor it? His influence with his sister was so great that it was thought he would be able to decide the matter as he wished. The old judge was not taken into consideration at all. Although an eminently respectable personage, he had nearly reached the limit of threescore and ten, and his attention was supposed to be chiefly occupied by his projected History of the American Bench.

Harold, at first, showed a disposition to sneer at John Parmelee. He called him a mountebank and a usurer, and cast reflections upon his birth and education. But after a while, and without appareut cause, he changed his tone. He praised John as a man of genius and a true American, and declared that the girl would be lucky who should call him husband.

Such being the case, no one was surprised when the engagement of Sallie Blackmer to John Parmelee was announced. No one, that is, except the old judge, who forthwith made it known that the marriage between John and Sallie should not take place until the former should have achieved a position befitting an alliance so much beyond his station.

John accepted the situation with his wonted good humor and enterprise. He worked hard, and in two years from the date of the engagement he was appointed cashier of the bank. The judge then gave a reluctant consent to the nuptials; but a week afterward he died, with his great history still in its early chapters, and with scarce any available funds in his bank account. He had been living on his capital.

When the house and furniture had been sold, and the debts paid, there remained fifteen thousand dollars, of which Harold got ten and Sallie five. Sallie and John were married, and Harold took up his quarters in a couple of rooms in Parmelee's house.

This house was a part of the bank building, and communicated with the bank office by means of an iron door, of which the cashier kept the key. Such an arrangement is not uncommon in small towns; and of course implied that the bank had unlimited confidence in its cashier.

For a time all went well. Then there began to be rumors of dissensions between the brothers in law. Nothing official could be learned on the subject; but there can be no harm in stating, here, that Harold fell into the habit of frequently borrowing sums of money from John, and not repaying them; that John finally protested; that Sallie thought her husband was too harsh; and that repeated family jars were the result.

They culminated at last in Harold's leaving Parmelee's house and betaking himself (as was supposed) to New York. He left a rather mal-

odorous reputation behind him, though many persons still declared him to be a fine fellow. Others affirmed that he was even guilty of dishonesty, and would surely end badly.

At all events, it was from this point that John Parmelee's misfortunes began. A few weeks after Harold's departure, Mrs. Parmelee was taken ill, and a daughter was born prematurely. The child lived, but the mother's health was seriously impaired. She did not leave her bed for several months; the child, too, was ailing. When the mother got about again, she suffered so much nervous pain that her physicians prescribed small doses of morphia. The pain was gradually relieved; and John, always hopeful, began to think that his trials were near their end.

Herein he was egregiously mistaken. Worse —much worse than he had ever dreamed of— was in store for him.

II.

THE tragic passage of John Parmelee's life did not come immediately, however. They were preceded by a period of comparative peace and happiness. Human existence is full of these contrasts, which seem almost deliberately artistic in their merciless light and shade.

Mrs. Parmelee gave little tea parties once a week, which were attended by the best people in town. John's dramatic capabilities were brought into play; his wife played and sang an accompaniment to his songs: the evening generally ended with a little dance, and every body went away delighted. The young couple were in great social demand, and could have gone out every night in the week if they had wished to. They were the cause of unwonted gayety in Tisdale.

But, though they enjoyed all this, they enjoyed each other's society best of all. They

were never so well contented as when they were alone together in their little sitting room, talking over their affairs, and their plans and hopes for the future.

John—so his wife declared—would one day become president of the bank, and immensely wealthy. Sallie herself would be a great lady, the patroness of innumerable benevolent institutions. Their daughters should all be fair and good; their sons brave and brilliant. The little daughter who had already come to them—Sophie was her name—was even now as good as so small a baby could be expected to be; but she was only the beginning.

"We shall never have a daughter so sweet as you, though, love!" John would say to his wife; and, "we may have noble boys, but never one to equal my darling husband!" Sallie would reply. The world seemed kind and generous to them, because they saw it through each other's eyes.

During the following spring, Sallie's health again failed; she was not ill in bed, but her nerves were out of order, she suffered neuralgic pains, and the evening entertainments had to

be given up. John wanted to consult a physician, but his wife refused; she was sure she would be well again when the summer set in.

Meantime, she resumed her doses of morphia, which she had discontinued during the winter. Their immediate effect was always to banish pain and induce quiet sleep. The matter seemed so simple that Sallie, who knew nothing of the evil latent in the drug, resorted to it more and more often until she became uneasy if a day passed without its use.

As for her husband, he had never been ill in his life, and his knowledge of medicine was very limited. But love sharpened his perceptions; he saw that his wife's moods were more unequal than they used to be; that she was unnaturally depressed at certain times, and as unnaturally stimulated at others; at last he put two and two together, and urged her to give up the use of her favorite nostrum.

She was impressed by his remonstrances, and promised compliance. For a while she kept her word. But it was no such easy matter as she had fancied. The longing was ever present and ever increasing. Sallie had always

been indulged by her father, and had never before been subjected to the discipline of suffering. At length she was unable to hold out longer against temptation; but she shrank from openly opposing her husband, and therefore resumed her habit secretly.

From the moment this concealment began, the issue was only a question of time. The more she yielded, the greater became her craving; by and by she substituted pure opium for morphia, and her nervous system and bodily functions became totally deranged.

John Parmelee could not but notice the change in his wife's aspect and condition. He doubted, feared and watched, and was at last confronted with the revelation that his beautiful and beloved Sallie was a confirmed opium eater.

Under the stimulus of his passionate grief and entreaties she once more strove to reclaim herself. But her strength, both of body and mind, was by this time seriously impaired; and the effort failed.

Few things are more difficult to shake off than an established tyranny of this kind.

Sallie's relapse reduced her to a more hopeless state than ever; for her degradation preyed upon her mind, and the anguish thus created could be assuaged only by further indulgences. The bloom of her youthful beauty faded and disappeared; her native grace and charm were dimmed; she became moody in temper and careless in dress. She would sit, for hours at a time, at the window, gazing out into the street, saying nothing and apparently seeing nothing.

At other times, she would clasp her baby to her bosom and break forth into tremulous moans and sobs. Often she would stand muttering to herself and drawing her fingers constantly through her long, dark hair.

John watched her and prayed for her, with agony in his heart, and the hours which he was obliged to spend at his desk in the bank were continually haunted by the dread of some calamity.

The calamity came at last.

One morning, in the early dawn, John awoke suddenly from a deep sleep. He perceived at once that his wife was not by his side. For a few moments he lay listening intently for the

sound of her footsteps in the outer-room, but all was silent.

He got up, benumbed with fear, and his eye fell upon a fold of white paper, fastened to the pin-cushion on the dressing table. He unfolded it, and, carrying it to the window, read the few heart-breaking words of farewell which Sallie had left behind her.

"My darling husband," she wrote, "you will be happier, in the end, that I am gone. I am not fit to be your wife or Sophie's mother. I am not myself; I am not the girl you married; an evil spirit has power over me. You pity me now; soon you would despise me, and at last you would hate me. It is better to go before that comes. Do not think that I shall be very miserable. My mind is too dull for that, and my heart is too lifeless; and then, when I take my opium, all good and evil become like a dream. I carry with me what money I need and the jewels my mother left me. Love my baby for me and let her think that I am dead. And so I shall be, my darling husband, before we meet again. Your Sallie."

John Parmelee dressed himself in silence,

called the nurse and bade her look after the baby, Sophie; packed his valise, and then went to the house of the bank president. That dignitary happened to be an early riser, and came down in his dressing gown. John set his teeth and told him the facts, and asked for a month's leave of absence.

It was the first vacation he had ever asked for, and could not be refused, though the president remarked that John would do better to put the matter into the hands of detectives. "There can be no detective so keen as a man who loves his wife," replied Parmelee; and possibly he was right. He set out immediately and nothing more was heard of him until the month had expired.

On that day he reappeared, as he had gone, alone; but he was no longer the same John Parmelee as formerly. The sunshine and frolic were gone out of him. He had found no trace of his wife; she had vanished as utterly as the flame of an extinguished lamp. In the search for her he had finally used every means available, and had expended the savings of his lifetime; but all was in vain. So the bank cashier

had returned to his duties and to his little daughter.

It was the general belief that Sallie Parmelee was dead. But her husband would never consent to accept this view. He always insisted that she still lived; and that at the last —at the long last—she would come back to him. And he entertained a curious suspicion (of which, however, he spoke but seldom) that she was being kept out of sight by some enemy of his, and that this accounted for the failure to discover her.

But who was an enemy of John Parmelee? There was only one person who could possibly answer that description; and that was his brother-in-law, Harold Blackmer. John mentioned no names, however; and before many months the entire matter ceased to occupy the Tisdale mind, and was seldom alluded to by any one.

Parmelee's wedded life had lasted barely five years, and he had not yet reached the prime of manhood; yet, in less than a year thereafter, he was already looking and speaking like an elderly man. He had the sympathy and respect

of the community, and he had the companionship of his little Sophie; but his loving heart was always wandering through the world in quest of his lost wife. He did not become hard or bitter; bitterness can have no part in such a nature as his; but his once buoyant spirit was broken, and his smile suggested tears rather than mirth.

He kept to his duties at the bank with a mechanical regularity and faithfulness that were almost painful; but he probably found some relief in this application, and once, when the directors offered him a holiday and to pay his expenses on a trip abroad, he thanked them, but shook his head.

"I couldn't get on without my work," he said; "and besides—who knows?— while I was away, my Sallie might come back!"

He was sadly changed, indeed; but he had not reached the darkest points of his fortunes, even yet.

III.

THE baby, Sophie Parmelee, grew up to be an old-fashioned little girl, with dark, wavy hair and black solemn eyes. She did what she could, as the years went by, with her small hands and immense love, to supply the place of both wife and daughter to her father.

He was fond of her, and always gentle and kind toward her; but he did not notice her much, or seem to realize that she was beginning to have thoughts and sentiments of her own. She was not a quick child, and he thought her rather stupid. She went to school and studied her lessons conscientiously; but her teachers gave no flattering report of her intellectual progress. As to the development of her heart and affections, the teachers neither knew nor said any thing.

Nevertheless, after making all allowances, there was a feeling among John's friends that there was something foreign to his nature in

his indifference toward Sophie. He had always been fond of children ; but for this child of his own flesh and blood, he evinced little more than a kindly toleration. Could there be any unknown cause at the bottom of this behavior ?

His ambition was gone ; he never looked or hoped beyond the day's work ; his vigorous health declined ; and all this might be ascribed to the effects of his loss ; but, in addition, some insidious physical disease seemed to be at work upon his constitution. What was it ?

When questioned upon the subject, he always declared that nothing was the matter with him.

"I'm getting older, of course," he would say, with a sad laugh ; "the youngest of us is doing that ; but I never was sounder in my life !" And with that he would escape as speedily as possible from his friendly inquisitors.

His friends were right, however. Something was wrong with John Parmelee ; and it was something which the acutest of them did not suspect.

His face grew pale and haggard ; his eyes were restless and bright ; he would start and

tremble nervously for slight cause; and occasionally he would be caught thinking aloud—a trick heretofore unknown in him.

But he uttered no complaint, and made no confidence; he guarded his secret, whatever it was, as cunningly and anxiously as if it were the bloodstain of a murder. He believed that no one guessed it. But there was one who had known it almost from the beginning; and that one was the person whom he would have suspected last of all; the one who was nearest to him and who loved him best,—his little daughter Sophie.

Each day he stolidly performed his allotted work. But each night, in the solitude of his room, when Sophie had gone to her room, and was (as he fancied) asleep, he would lock the doors and draw the curtains, and hasten, with trembling hands, to revel in his one fatal indulgence, as a miser revels in his gold.

Alas! for John Parmelee.

The constant grief and dark monotony of his life had broken down, at last, the barriers of his will and self-respect. From the anguish of mournful thoughts and sad surmises, he had

sought refuge in the false repose of artificial dreams and visions.

Perhaps it was some perverted instinct of loyalty to his lost wife that had prompted him to call down upon his own head the calamity that had ruined her; and, since he could not trace her actual footsteps, to follow in the broad trail of her degradation.

Be that as it may, the truth must be told—that John Parmelee had himself fallen under the deadening dominion of the opium habit. It was the one selfish and cowardly act of a man otherwise good and pure.

It may be said, in his defense, that he had persuaded himself it would not prevent—possibly he may have fancied that it would facilitate—the discharge of his duties to his employers; and that his concealment of the practice was as much due to his regard for Sophie as to his own sense of shame. He did not wish her to be overshadowed by the disgrace of his self-indulgence; and he did not realize that he was, meanwhile, shutting her out from that enjoyment of his love and confidence which was all she cared for.

But it was in keeping with the child's shyness and reticence not to allude to the knowledge which she possessed, since he did not allude to it. She respected his desire for secrecy without understanding it. Doubtless she did not comprehend the moral bearings of the case, and believed that whatever the father whom she loved did must be right. But she saw clearly enough that the habit rendered his behavior at times strange and uncertain; that it robbed his character of its depth and transparency; and that in various indescribable ways it made him childlike and helpless, and unfit to take care of himself.

Therefore, effectively yet unobtrusively, she lavished upon him the most watchful and tender care. Often, without his suspecting it, she aided him to conceal his vice from others, and even upon occasion affected to be blind herself to what she saw too well. So far from resenting his lack of confidence in her, she led him to think that she was unconscious of it.

On the evening on which this story opens, Sophie, as has been intimated, prepared the supper, and sat down in her chair by the fire to

await her father's arrival. It was his custom, after his duties at the bank were over, to attend to whatever business he might have in the town, and then go to the post-office; after which he always came home, arriving at exactly six o'clock. But on this occasion he was already half an hour late, and Sophie began to be anxious.

A moment later, however, she saw his figure pass the window, and heard his step upon the threshold. As he entered the room she rose from her chair and looked earnestly at him. She perceived at once that he was pre-occupied and agitated.

He did not notice her, or seem to see her. He took off his hat and overcoat, and threw them on the sofa; then dropped into a chair, pulled an open letter from his pocket and began to study it with a troubled countenance, ever and anon passing his fingers nervously over his mouth and chin.

Sophie had opened the kitchen door, and was bringing out the supper and putting it on the table. Meanwhile her father's self communings formed themselves into audible words.

"That handwriting!" he muttered, staring at the letter; "it's disguised, of course; but it may be hers—it must be! She doesn't want me to know she's alive. Ah, Sallie, Sallie! as if I shouldn't have felt it, if you were dead!

"'They will attempt it to-night,' she writes. Who? Harold, of course. Don't I know what he wanted to do when he was living here? But how should she . . . ? She must be with him! She has discovered his schemes, and writes to warn me. Heaven bless her! She thinks of me—she loves me still! She has not forgotten me!

"But to be with him—to be in his power, perhaps! What a fate! I must save her!"

He half rose from his chair, then sank back in it again.

"But the bank!" he said. "Ay, the bank! I must save that first!"

"Papa," said Sophie, quietly, from the table, "supper is ready."

He looked up with a start. "Supper? Why, so it is! Sophie, dear, I didn't see you. Come and give papa a kiss." She came to him, and as he embraced her she threw her arms

round his neck and whispered in his ear; "Papa, darling papa, I love you!"

A smile shone in his face, but passed away after a moment; he seated himself at the table and began to eat with the same pre-occupied air as before.

Presently he stopped, and began thinking aloud again.

"It won't do to tell the directors! If they caught him they would get hold of Sallie, too; and my innocent darling would be dragged into a police court! No—no! I must manage this affair alone. Let me think! Why not lie in wait for him, and when he comes—well, if it comes to a fight, I'm a better man than he is, still! Then tell him I'll spare him, if he'll show me where Sallie is! He'll do it—of course he will! any thing to escape! Ay, but he may bring others with him, and they may be armed. Let me think!"

He sank into a brown study once more.

"Papa," said Sophie, "may I sit up in this room and read to-night? I'm not sleepy."

"Sit up and read!" he exclaimed, rousing himself and staring at her. "What an idea!

You get too little sleep as it is. No, no! You must go to bed right after supper, dear; to-night especially."

There was another silence.

"I have it!" he said, suddenly leaning back in his chair. "I have it! Of course! Why didn't I think of it before. The money will be secure; and, once I'm sure of that, let me alone to deal with a dozen Harolds!"

He got up from the table, took a large key from his pocket, and went to the iron door already mentioned, which gave access through the partition to the bank office, where the safe was kept. He opened this door and passed through it into the bank.

What he was about to do was doubtless not the wisest or the best thing to be done. But one of the most unfailing effects of opium is to unsettle the judgment and to warp the moral sense.

IV.

AFTER the lapse of ten minutes John Parmelee returned through the doorway, locking the iron door behind him. He carried under his arm a brown paper parcel, about a foot in length, and eight inches in width and thickness.

Putting back the dishes from one side of the supper table he placed the bundle upon it, and resumed his chair. But his pre-occupied manner had now left him.

"Sophie," he said, "lock the front and kitchen doors, pull down all the window shades, and, if any one should knock, give no answer. Papa must not be disturbed."

Sophie did as she was bid. When the last shade had been drawn, her father untied the bundle. There was disclosed a quantity of papers, finely engraved with letters and figures in black, green and gold; and several packages of bank notes of high denominations. All

these he examined carefully, one by one, referring every moment to a written list on the table beside him. This examination lasted a considerable time, and seemed to be satisfactory.

He then remade the parcel, tying it up carefully.

Sophie, meanwhile, had cleared the table, and had then established herself in her low chair by the fireside, with a book in her lap.

Parmelee remained for a while in meditation, with his eyes fixed upon the bundle. At length he drew a long breath, sat erect, and spoke to his daughter:

"Come here, darling," he said; "papa wants to talk to you."

She came at once, and stood beside him. He put his arm round her, seated her on his knee, and kissed her cheeks.

"Sophie," he began, "I'm going to let you into a secret. It's important that some one besides myself should know it; and I can confide in no better person than my little girl. You may not be very clever; but I know you are faithful and brave, and that papa can trust

you. But you must not let any body know, unless I give you leave. Do you promise?"

Sophie lifted her great black eyes to his for a moment, while her cheeks flushed.

"Yes," said she.

"That's right!" he returned. "Now listen. The package you see there contains a great deal of money in notes and bonds and securities—more than fifty-seven thousand dollars' worth."

"Is it our money?" the child inquired.

"No, it is not. It is twice as much as papa has earned in all his lifetime. It belongs to the bank's depositors; and the bank will hold me responsible if any thing should happen to it. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she said again.

"Now, Sophie," he went on. "Papa has received a letter this evening, without any name signed to it, but which I believe was written by a person whom I love very much. The letter says that some wicked people are going to try to get this money out of the safe in the bank to-night, and carry it away; and tells me to be on my guard."

"Do you mean robbers, papa?" demanded the child, in a low tone.

"Yes, robbers! Well, ordinarily I should report the matter to the directors, and they, if they saw fit, would put policemen on guard, to catch the robbers if they came. But, in this case, I have reason to think that to do so would get an innocent person—the person who wrote the letter—into trouble. So I am going to try to manage it myself, without telling the directors at all."

Sophie looked up and nodded her head, with a look of solemn intelligence on her little face.

"I have taken the money out of the safe, as you see," he resumed, "so that, even if the robbers open the safe in spite of me, they will find nothing; and I am going to hide it away in a secret place which no one will know of but you and I."

"Will the robbers kill you, papa?" asked the child, with a little tremor in her voice.

"I guess not!" he replied, with a laugh. "They will probably be so much frightened, when they see me, that they will be only too glad to be allowed to get away. Still, some-

thing might happen; and in case it should—if I were to be prevented in any way from telling the directors myself where the money is hidden, then my little Sophie's part in the affair will come in. You must take the president, or Mr. Tyrrel, to the secret place, and tell them what I have told you. Do you think you could manage that for me?"

"I'm sure you mean that they will kill you!" said the child falteringly.

"Pooh! what an idea! No, no; but if I shall be called away for any reason, I shall depend upon you to guard that package—never to let it go out of your reach—till I come back, or till the directors ask you for it. That would be helping papa very much. Will you try, my darling?"

"I would rather die than not help you," said Sophie, and a tear ran down her cheek and dropped on her hand.

"You are a good little girl," said her father, smiling at her, and stroking her thick dark hair.

Sophie rested her head on his shoulder. She had never felt so unhappy and so happy, both

at once. Her father had seldom spoken to her so intelligibly and so tenderly as now; he seemed more like himself than he had done for a long time. But the thought of his danger filled her throat with tears till it ached, and made her heart swell.

"And now you shall see the hiding place!" said he, getting up and taking the bundle.

He went to a spot on the left of the fireplace and near the door of his bed-chamber. Here he knelt down, unhooked a corner of the carpet from its fastening, and turned it back.

A part of two adjoining planks of the floor was thus revealed. A section, fifteen inches in length, had been sawed through at each end. Parmelee pried it up with the blade of his penknife, and lifted it off like the lid of a box.

Beneath was a box-like cavity, empty, save for a little dust.

"It was in this hiding-place that your mamma and I used to keep our money and valuables—when we had any!' said he; and then he gave a sigh.

He dropped the parcel into the cavity, which contained it, with some room to spare. After

replacing the section of plank and the carpet, he rose to his feet slowly, and went and stood with his back to the fire, and his head bent downward.

He had never told Sophie any thing about her mother; and the child's remembrance of her was very vague. She did not know whether she were dead or alive, or, if alive, what had been the cause of her going away. She had never ventured to ask for information on these points, because she supposed that her father would have told her, if he had wished her to know.

But this evening he had addressed her in a manner so different from his usual one that she felt emboldened to ask him the questions that had waited so long. She had reseated herself in her little chair, and her eyes were fixed upon the fire.

"Is mamma in heaven?" she inquired at length.

John Parmelee started.

"In heaven? No!" he said; and, after a pause, he added, "But if there is a hell upon this earth, she must have been there!"

"Is there a hell upon this earth, papa?"

Parmelee had always been a religious man, and not disposed to speculate upon the dealings of Providence with human beings. But the merciless sword of fate had smitten deeply into his soul, and he had known what desolation and misery meant.

"Yes, Sophie, there is a hell upon this earth," he replied; "and no other hell can be more cruel and hopeless! For it is a hell only for the innocent, and not for the guilty."

"How did mamma get into it?" the child asked.

"Your mamma was a lovely and beloved woman," he answered, speaking slowly at first, but gathering emphasis and energy as he went on. "God made her beautiful, and gave her a sweet and gentle nature. She harmed no one; and one might have thought that her Creator would have protected her from harm and degradation. But He permitted a curse to fasten itself upon her which ruined her in body and mind! She was without sin, yet a punishment fit for the chief of sinners fell upon her! It was a devil, coming to her in the likeness of an

angel with healing on its wings! It seemed to bless her with a soothing sleep while it was corrupting her with a lingering poison! And I was forced to stand by and see her slowly withered and destroyed, without power to prevent or soften a single pang! Among men, even the sternest justice has mercy enough to kill; but God, the all merciful, drove out this innocent woman into the world, alone, to meet the scorn and insults of the basest of His creatures. But oh, Sallie, my own darling wife; I love you, and I'll follow you! I couldn't save you from the curse, but I can share it! My sweetheart! my poor girl! Whatever depth of shame and misery you may reach, you will find me there, to love and reverence you!"

V.

SOPHIE stood gazing at her father with pale cheeks and distended eyes.

His outburst had become almost savage in its intensity, and it was evident that he had soon become oblivious of the presence of his little daughter. He paced up and down the room, throwing up his arms and sobbing, at last, in the extremity of his desolation.

She had never heard him speak such words before. Nor must it be supposed that they indicated the normal color of his thoughts. But this was the subject upon which he had brooded longest and felt most poignantly; and the excitement and suspense of hearing (as he fancied) from his wife, added to the nervous derangement consequent upon his indulgence, had hurried him into unwonted expressions of rebellion and blasphemy.

Finally, in his forgings about the room, he came directly toward Sophie; and as she

moved to get out of his way, he perceived her, and stopped short, pressing his hands against his temples.

Gradually the wild expression in his eyes died away; he stretched forth his hand and touched her, as if to assure himself that she was flesh and blood, and not a vision of his brain; and then he spoke in a husky but gentle tone:

"Why do you look so scared, dear? Don't mind what papa says or does. I sometimes forget—I think I am somewhere else. There, there; I'm all right again now. But it's late; time for you to be in your room and asleep. Good-night, little girl!"

"Oh, papa, let me stay with you! let me have the curse, too!" cried the child, with passionate earnestness, throwing her little arms around him. "If you leave me, I am all alone; there is nobody else to care for me!"

"Leave you, darling? Leave my little daughter?" he said, bending over and pressing her to him. "No, no, no! we shall always be together, Sophie—you and I! And what do you know of curses? You shall never know, please God! You shall be my little guardian

angel, and then the curse will be afraid to come, even to me! Will you save me, Sophie? And mamma, too?"

Sophie could not answer in words; she clung to him and sobbed.

"Listen then, dear," he said, after a moment, kneeling on one knee, so as to bring his face on a level with hers; "it shall be so; you shall save papa; and afterward we will save mamma together. Papa will be a better man for your sake, and I will begin—" he hesitated—"I will begin to-morrow."

"You don't need to be better! You are good already!" sobbed Sophie, indignantly.

"I will begin to-morrow!" he repeated. And now go to bed, darling. I have something to do, and I must be alone."

He followed her, with a smile, to the door of her chamber, and closed it after her.

When he turned round, the expression of his face had changed. He now wore an eager, secret, and hungry look.

The hour at which he usually took his opium had been long passed, and a fierce craving was upon him. The promise of amendment which

he had made to Sophie, though it may have been ambiguous to her comprehension, had a definite meaning to John Parmelee; it was a promise, that, after to-night, he would break off the habit.

But to-night was still before him, and partly because it was to be the last, and partly in order to fortify himself for the adventure which awaited him further on, he made up his mind to allow himself an extra large dose.

Muttering in an undertone, he walked with a hurried step to a cupboard, unlocked it with a key that he carried about him, and took down from the top shelf a small metal box.

He then seated himself at the table and opened the box with tremulous fingers. It contained some lumps of a peculiar reddish brown substance, from which emanated a singular odor.

While he was preparing a portion of this substance for consumption, John Parmelee manifested such symptoms of ravenous impatience as might be shown by a starving man in the presence of savory food. When all was ready he thrust the portion into his mouth, and,

hastening to the sofa, sank down upon it with a long sigh of gratified appetite.

The opium eater's hour of bliss was come,—the hour which prevails in the balance against the disgrace and misery of a lifetime.

But the double dose which he had taken was destined to have another effect than he had anticipated.

The influence of the drug varies, within certain limits, according to the temperament and general condition of the consumer. But there is always the possibility that, at some moment, under special circumstances, the brain may receive a shock which will occasion temporary or permanent derangement, as the case may be.

Some persons never undergo this experience; Parmalee had hitherto escaped it, but now his time had come.

At first, a look of mere repose and contentment settled upon his features; his arms rested easily by his sides; his attitude was relaxed and indolent. So he lay, without movement and with half closed eyes, for an hour or more.

Then by degrees his breathing became un-

even and audible; his lips worked; various expressions, frowns and half smiles, flitted across his face. He began to utter incoherent words in a muffled voice. At length these words joined themselves together in consecutive sentences.

"She will come back!" he said. "I'll say: 'Come, Sallie, it has all been an evil dream; but it's over now!' She will come; we are young yet; we shall be happy—happier than ever. And we'll never touch opium again—never! I promised it for Sophie's sake. We three will live together for years and years—happy, blessed years! And Sallie and I will sing our songs again. How sweet her voice was, and how sweetly it mingled with mine! I must begin practicing again; it will never do for Sallie to catch me out of tune!"

He began to hum a little song, beginning,—

> I loved my love last year;
> We met in the midst of June,—

But before he had finished the first stanza his voice suddenly died away, and the next moment he started to his feet.

He stood motionless and as rigid as iron.

His eyes were fixed staringly upon a point in the room between the two windows.

There was no one there, but he saw some one; and the expression of his face showed a strange mingling of emotions, in which amazement and joy predominated. After a minute he advanced a step, holding out his arms, then paused and gazed intently.

"Sallie!" he whispered. "Sallie—is that you?"

No answer came back from the emptiness of the room. He changed his position a little, as if following the movement of some object toward the left.

"Why don't you speak to me?" he said. "Why don't you come to me? What makes you look so strange? You haven't forgotten me, love—your Jack—your own husband? Sallie Ah! where is she?—not gone?—not—"

He uttered a cry of alarm, and wheeled about. But, immediately, he seemed to regain his composure, though he breathed heavily.

"There you are again! and smiling, too! She was only playing a trick on me—some of

your fun, wasn't it, Sallie? But—you've been away so long! and I—I've missed you so! Such a weary time I've spent, love! You must comfort me a little first; then play as many jokes as you like!"

He was moving slowly across the room, seemingly following the apparition, which retreated before him. Ever and anon he stretched forth his hand, as if to grasp it; but it eluded him. Now it appeared to be entering the bed-chamber, then to slip by him, and pass in front of the fireplace; next, it was at Sophie's door; again, it had turned and flitted back to the place where he first saw it. At times, he would lose track of it altogether; but, before the cry of dismay could pass his lips, the phantom would reappear, and the strange pursuit begin again.

It was pathetic, the hysteric earnestness with which he kept up the chase; because, to any other senses than John Parmelee's, the room was vacant of any presence save his own. Every faculty of his mind and body was strained upon a specter of his own disordered brain; but, in the ghastly world of opium, illusions

have more than the force of substantial things.

But all at once a new change took place. The delirious man was now facing the street door, to the threshold of which the phantom had retreated. His voice rose almost to a scream.

"You're not going, Sallie? not going to leave me again?—before speaking a word, or so much as letting me touch your hand! You can't mean it in earnest! I'll die if you desert me—I've been near enough death as it is! My God! She's waving me farewell—and going... I'll not bear it! Where you go, I'll follow, lead me where you will!"

He caught up his hat from the sofa, on which he had flung it when entering, and rushed to the door, just as the apparition seemed to pass out of it.

The door was locked on the inside. Without stopping to marvel at this, he unlocked it in desperate haste, and was off at full speed down the silent road.

The phantom fled before him; but, save for that, he was alone.

VI.

SOPHIE, all this while, had not been asleep, nor even abed.

She had at first wept silently; and then, when no more tears would come, she had sat huddled up on the bed, with her little fingers clasped round her knees, like an East Indian mummy, and thought about her father and her mother, and about all the mystery and sadness that had already entered into her brief life.

The words her father had repeated, "I will begin to-morrow," kept occurring to her memory; she had not known exactly what he meant by them; but she hoped that he would begin to be happier. Had she understood him to mean that he would give up opium, she might—young as she was—have been a little skeptical.

Presently, her reveries were interrupted by the sound of her father's voice, murmuring to himself. There was nothing unusual in this;

she had heard the same thing almost every night for years; and on several occasions, when he had become more bewildered than usual, she had led him to his room and stayed with him until he fell asleep; a fact of which, however, he had retained no recollection the next morning.

The present attack sounded to Sophie as if it was going to be exceptionally severe. Her father's voice rose to such a pitch of agitation that she became uneasy, and began to debate with herself whether or not she should go out and try to quiet him. She had decided that she would do so, and had already got off the bed for that purpose, when, quite abruptly, the sound ceased altogether, and a dead stillness followed.

"He must be better; he will go to sleep now," thought Sophie.

But the stillness had come so suddenly, and was so absolute, that she still felt anxiety. The paroxysms had generally subsided gradually; and her father would often pace the floor for a long time before going to bed. But to-night all demonstrations had ceased abruptly as the

flow of water when the tap is turned off. What could be the reason of it?

Sophie waited a quarter of an hour before making up her mind to look into the outer room and see what was the matter. If her father were awake and well, she knew he would be displeased to find that she had disobeyed his order to go to bed. But at length her anxiety got the better of her; she opened the door softly, put forth her little head of dark shaggy hair, and looked about.

Her father was certainly not in the sitting-room.

"I suppose he has gone into his own room," was her first thought.

She slipped out to investigate. The door of her father's chamber was ajar; but, when she peeped in, the bed was empty. He was not there.

The child's heart began to beat painfully, and she stood intertwining her fingers nervously.

Then it occurred to her that he might have returned to the bank by way of the iron door. She went to the door, and tried it. It was locked, and the key was in the lock.

What could have become of him?

She returned to the sitting-room, and then she noticed, for the first time, that her father's hat was no longer on the sofa, where she had last seen it.

At the same moment, the thought of the robbers flashed into her mind. What if they had come in, and carried him away!

She ran to the street door, which she remembered having locked in obedience to her father's request. It was unlocked; but it must have been unlocked from the inside, for there was the key. Evidently, therefore, if he had gone out it was of his own will.

The little girl felt like bursting into tears again. But she controlled this impulse, summoned all her strength and resolution, and forced herself to think.

Two things were plain: That her father was gone; and that he had departed in the midst of one of his worst paroxysms. Therefore, it was probable that he had not known what he was about, and, that being the case, a calamity might happen to him at any moment.

"I must go after him and bring him back!" Sophie said aloud.

It was a hopeless scheme; for a crazy man was just as likely to go in one direction as another, and he already had half an hour's start. But Sophie, with the mystic confidence of childhood, had no doubt that she would be led directly in his footsteps, or that, when overtaken, he would return with her.

There was no time to be lost, at all events.

In five minutes she had put on her pelisse and hat, put in her pocket a few dollars from the money drawer (in case she should have to travel by train), and had her hand on the latch of the street door. But there she stopped, appalled!

There was something that she had forgotten. She turned slowly back, and re-entered the sitting-room. The glow of action and resolve faded out of her cheeks and eyes. Her heart felt ready to break.

For there was all that immense sum of money which her father had entrusted to her charge. She had promised him that, in the event of his absence, she would take care of it,

and not let it go out of her reach. He was gone, and her promise bound her to remain.

The choice offered to her was one which every man and woman has to answer for themselves once in their lives. Should she yield to the impulse of love and anxiety for her father, or should she stand loyal to the trust confided in her? Honor or love—which should rule?

She did not debate the question long. She was not skilled in sophistry. She threw herself down on the floor, over the place where the money was hidden, and lay there on her face.

It was a cruel situation for a child to be in. On the one hand she knew that her father, the only being she loved in the world, was helpless and probably in danger; and she knew, on the other hand, that the bank-robbers might appear at any moment; and Sophie was no more fond of robbers than are other young people of her age. But she had made up her mind not to abandon the money that belonged to others, and for which her father would be held responsible by the directors.

So there she lay on the floor, feeling as if she should die.

But at length, after a lapse of time that probably seemed to her longer than it really was, a new idea entered her mind—an idea that caused her to spring up from the floor with a cry of joy.

The idea was to this effect: Why should she not go after her father, taking the money along with her?

She could easily carry it in the big black satchel; there would be no difficulty about that, and the plan was feasible on other grounds. For, if she remained where she was, and the robbers came, they would first attack the safe; but then, finding no money there, they would in all probability enter the house, and perhaps discover the money in its hiding-place; and she would not be able to prevent their taking it.

But if, on the other hand, she were to go away with the packet in her satchel, though the house were filled with robbers, they could get nothing; and meanwhile she would find her father and bring him back.

This was the way Sophie argued; and for a child who was considered stupid, the argument was by no means an unintelligent one.

She was not long in putting her scheme into execution.

She got out the big black satchel from its place in the closet. She placed it on the floor beside the hiding place; then uncovered the latter and extracted the parcel of notes and securities. It went into the satchel easily and left some room on top.

This place she filled up with her little night dress, and her comb and brush. Altogether, it made a heavy load for her small hands to carry. But Sophie felt energy enough in her to carry a mountain, had that been necessary.

All was now ready. She took a last look round the room; then put out the lamp, and sallied forth, locking the street door behind her, and hanging the key on its nail beneath the window sill. No one was stirring in the street; the inhabitants of Tisdale were accustomed to go to bed early.

Sophie, after a short deliberation, turned her face toward New York; and, in another moment, she had disappeared in the darkness.

VII.

HAROLD BLACKMER was one of those men not uncommon in this country, who steps at once from childhood into manhood ; he omitted the season of youth altogether. This might be regarded as a gain in time ; but in other respects it was a loss, though Blackmer himself doubtless did not view it in that light. He thought that to live one must be a man of the world ; that sentiment and illusion were a waste of tissue and opportunity.

This conception on his part was due to the fact that he was naturally of an extremely sensitive disposition. His acute and impressionable intellect was quick to investigate and comprehend other people's opinion of him ; and his vanity or love of approbation led him to adopt such a line of speech and conduct as should be most likely to free him from the charges of ignorance and absurdity. He could not bear to be laughed at, even good-naturedly ;

and as he perceived that inexperience in the ways of the world generally caused amusement in those who were better informed, he made it a point, first, to learn and practice the ways of the world as promptly as possible; and, secondly, to disguise whatever inexperience he might be conscious of.

A child naturally believes in the good-will and honesty of those with whom he is brought in contact. Harold, at the outset, was occasionally deceived like other children; but, unlike them, he rapidly divested himself of his instinctive belief in human nature, and trained himself to believe in nothing at all. This early skepticism had the effect upon his associates which he desired. He was called a "wide-awake boy," which gratified him; and he was accepted as a companion by persons much older than himself. His close observation and retentive memory enabled him to catch the tone of their thought and conversation, and to reproduce it successfully. He was resolute not to be shocked or abashed by whatever word or act of his friends, but on the contrary, to exhibit a cynicism and moral indifference of

an even more unhesitating kind than theirs. As his cleverness was above the average, and he had wit and tact, he found little difficulty in establishing the reputation he coveted.

At the same time, the instincts of his birth and breeding prevented him from lapsing into mere vulgar degradation. His manner was always polite and easy; his speech accurate and polished, and his physical habits nice. He kept himself immaculately clean, dressed elegantly, seldom swore, and never drank. He had good health and a handsome face and figure, and he took pains to preserve them in unimpaired condition. In every outward manifestation he was a gentleman. Women liked him, and were fond of receiving his attentions; his name for being somewhat reckless and unscrupulous did him no harm with them. His father, who had himself seen more of "life" than he would have cared to have known in his mature age, admired the young man and encouraged him. His sister worshiped him with all a sister's reverential ardor. It is not surprising that he came to feel that nothing was too good for him.

Such a feeling in such a character, requires money to make it secure. The judge lived like a wealthy man, but did not have much money to spare. Harold, therefore, was soon put to his trumps to maintain his elegant appearance. Accordingly, he early cultivated a natural gift he had for living at other people's expense, while giving them the impression that he was conferring a favor upon them. He was a familiar and favorite guest at the dinner-tables of all the available rich men in the neighborhood; he drove in their carriages and made use of their luxuries. He was the friend and ally of all who could be of use to him; all others he shunned and snubbed. He was shrewd enough to perceive that borrowing money was a clumsy and uncertain way of solving his main difficulty, and he practiced it but sparingly. On the other hand, he studied the art of betting with energy and with good results; and he developed something like a genius for cards and billiards. He had three tailors in his employ, and his dealings with them illustrated his business ability. He would order two or three suits of clothes at a time

from each of them; would sell all but two, at seventy or eighty per cent discount, to a second-hand dealer; and, when the bills were sent in, he would apply the second-hand dealer's money to payments on account. If the tailors pressed for more, he would lull them to security by ordering more clothes, which he would subject to the same ingenious process. By such devices, year after year, he contrived to keep ahead of disaster; and no one suspected how close to the wind he was sometimes obliged to sail.

When Parmelee became engaged to Sallie, Harold, as has been said, at first put himself in opposition to the match. Parmelee did not belong to his set; he had no aspirations after a fast and dashing life. But after a time, Harold began to regard the matter from another point of view. Though Parmelee was not rich or aristocratic, he might one day attain at least the former virtue; for he was diligent, intelligent, and trusted by his employers; and best of all, he was employed in the bank. He was cashier already; there was no telling but what he might become director or president; he

had the brains and the experience. To be the friend, still more the brother-in-law of such a man could do no harm; it might result in great benefit.

Accordingly, Harold changed his attitude completely, and became John's champion and cordial friend. He studied his character, and made note of its weak points. His habit of skepticism may have blinded him to some of its strong points; but no one can be omniscient. At all events, John was good-natured and trustful, and was especially inclined in Harold's favor, because of the latter's advocacy of his matrimonial hopes. Nor could he but be influenced by Sallie's enthusiasm for her brother, which she omitted no opportunity to express. Harold became a frequent caller at John's house, and the medium of communication between him and Sallie, when the judge developed his opposition to their union. A friend who brings a lover a letter from his mistress, seems to deserve the utmost confidence and gratitude of both parties. Harold professed to be acting quite disinterestedly; but he was only biding his time. He had already begun

to revolve a scheme, which, though it was not carried into execution until many years afterward, was always in his thoughts as a possible solution of all his pecuniary ambition.

This plan was nothing less than to rob the Tisdale Bank; availing himself for that purpose of his influence over Sallie, and of the knowledge which he expected to acquire through her and possibly through John, of the inner workings and arrangements of that institution. The bank ordinarily kept a large balance on hand; and occasionally the sum accumulated so rapidly as to reach the neighborhood of half a million of dollars. The safe in which the funds were kept, although a massive and formidable-looking affair, was constructed upon principles already out of date, and the lock could be picked by a cracksman of average skill. No attempt to try its strength had ever been made in the memory of the oldest inhabitant of Tisdale, and probably no one of its guardians or directors was so deficient in faith in his fellow-men as to anticipate any such outrage. The enterprise, therefore, was in all respects as free from technical difficulties as

could be expected. Nevertheless, it was not carried out as Harold designed.

In the first place, he had never hitherto actually broken the law, though there was nothing in the way of moral scruple to hinder his doing so. But his associations had been chiefly with gentlemen, and he feared to compromise himself by allying himself with the criminal classes. This apprehension involved his carrying out his scheme without assistance; and that was not easy. It was simple enough in imagination and theory; but when it came to putting the theory into practice, Harold lacked the confidence which comes only with training and custom. After his father's death and his sister's marriage, he was able to increase his intimacy with Parmelee; but he did not gain that free access to the safe, or that comprehensive knowledge of the inside workings of the bank on which he had calculated. It was not that John entertained any suspicions; but, whether by accident or by the instinct of a man in his responsible position, he always maintained reserve on the one point as to which Harold desired enlightenment. Nor

was Sallie able to afford him much help. She was loquacious on all matters within her knowledge; but the affairs of the bank were not within her knowledge, nor were they of interest to her. Harold, of course, could not ask her to make investigations for him; it would have thrown suspicion on him after the robbery, and it was part of his scheme that the crime should appear to have been committed by ordinary burglars. Moreover, the ten thousand dollars of Harold's portion kept him in funds for the time being, and caused him to procrastinate. Afterward, when he had speculated with the money, and lost it, he made the mistake of borrowing sums from Parmelee, who accomodated him willingly so far as his means admitted, and indeed somewhat further; but who expected that the loans would be returned in due time. When Harold failed to pay up, the situation became somewhat strained; and the end of it was, as we have seen, that he ceased to be a member of Parmelee's household. Thus his plans fell through for the time, though he did not relinquish them. He went to New York, where, in the pursuit of

fortune, he made the acquaintance of a class of persons very different from those he had known in Tisdale, and much better suited in principles, if not in social position, to the kind of man that Harold Blackmer was.

It will not be necessary to follow the whole course of his adventures during the ensuing ten or twelve years. At first, he took a high place among the crooked fraternity, and there was something dashing and commanding in his operations. His brain was clear and his nerves sound, and he succeeded for a long while in keeping beyond the reach of the laws. Sometimes he sought his ends through the machinations of politics; sometimes he entered into commercial or financial transactions; sometimes he appeared as the managing agent of speculative schemes which promised the largest returns for the smallest outlay. His manners were plausible, conciliating and attractive; he had the faculty of inspiring confidence and arguing people out of their better judgment. He visited every principal city in the Union, and spent a couple of years in Europe. Occasionally he came into possession of large sums

of money, which, with such ability as his, might have become the nucleus of a colossal fortune. But, like all his kind, he had upon him the curse of restlessness and insubordination; riches honestly come by were riches without enjoyment. To put money out at legal interest was intolerable; he must be wealthy by dint of audacious strokes of cunning and unscrupulousness; every thing he got must be regarded as income, never as capital. The money which he obtained must not be the return for any thing contributed by him to the wealth of the world; it must be made at the expense of other men.

Luck attended him so long, that at last he came to count upon it as a permanent element in his career; and then luck began to play fast and loose with him. A brilliant success would be followed by a mortifying or disastrous failure. At length he became entangled in a bogus money transaction, and was arrested. After a trial which was prolonged over some months, he escaped conviction on a technicality; but his portrait was in the rogues' gallery, and he was thenceforward a recognized member of the

criminal classes. He became more circumspect, but also more degraded and malignant. He associated with thieves and scoundrels of all descriptions; and though, owing to his superior intelligence and education, he played a leading part among them; he was none the less on their level in all but executive matters. Frequently he was hard put to it to keep up a respectable outward appearance; and more than once he had been obliged to pawn his clothes to get something to eat.

It was at about this period that, while passing one evening through an obscure street in one of the lower districts of the city, his attention was attracted by the sound of a woman's voice singing. Something in the quality of the voice caused him to approach the singer, who was a female past middle age apparently, and poorly clad. There was something familiar in her tones, and even in the words of the song she sang. She was surrounded by a little crowd of loiterers, and listening heads protruded here and there from the windows. When her song was ended, the woman held out a little basket which she carried for contribu-

tions. Two or three of her audience put coppers into it; and Harold, who had been standing behind her, stepped round her to get a view of her face; and recognized his sister, Sallie Parmelee.

VIII.

THIS unexpected encounter startled and impressed even his callous and corrupted heart. He took her to a neighboring eating-house, and questioned her. Reluctantly, and with many quite unnecessary stipulations that he would reveal nothing to her husband, she told him her story. It was dismal and pathetic enough. For many months after her departure from Tisdale, she had lived in a large tenement house in the thickly populated and shabby district south of East Fourteenth street. Seldom moving out of her room, except after dark, she entirely evaded all the efforts made to discover her; though once she had seen her husband turn the corner of a street, where the light of a gas-lamp showed his features, and then pass close by her, as she shrank back in the shadow of a doorway. She had felt a passionate impulse to cry out to him; but she had restrained it, partly

from fear and partly from shame, and he had passed on, and out of her sight forever.

The rent of the room which she had occupied was very small; her food cost her but a trifle; her chief expense was for opium. So long as the money she had brought with her held out, therefore, her life went on quite uneventfully; one day was the repetition of another, and all were tinged alike with the vague imagery of her opium dreams. When her money was exhausted, she sold her jewels, one after the other, dimly hoping that death might relieve her before this source of supplies also ran out. Death, as usual, was not so accommodating; and Sallie lacked either the resolution or the impiety to summon death on her own responsibility. But opium she must have; and to obtain that, money was necessary. How should she get it? There are ways in which a handsome woman may get money in a great city; and Sallie was handsome still. But something kept her from this irrevocable plunge; either temperament or conscience, or the very listlessness of her half bewildered state. Finally it occurred to her that she might practice as a

means of livelihood the accomplishment which, in happier days, had ministered to the pleasure of her friends; and she began to sing in the streets. Her voice had suffered by the life she had been leading, and the long lack of custom had impaired her facility; but much of the charm still remained, and the experiment succeeded beyond her hopes. Music never seems to fail of its effect over all classes of people. A certain famous prima donna was at that time receiving a thousand dollars a night for a few songs; and Sallie's receipts, on the first day of her new trade, amounted to a little less than a thousandth part as much. But it was sufficient for her necessities, and she asked no more.

Moreover, her inoffensive and gentle nature raised her up friends even among the dregs of the people, and stimulated whatever kindly instincts were left in them. She found shelter with the homeless, food with the hungry, and honesty with the dishonest. She harmed no one, and no one but herself harmed her. But she was without hope or aim in life, without fixed habitation, severed from all ties of blood; and gradually and inevitably she lapsed into

more and more squalid conditions, until, on the day that her brother met her, she needed but little to fall altogether out of human sight and knowledge. It was only the craving for opium that stimulated her to keep up the struggle for life.

Harold was himself on the losing side of the market; but, with his instinctive desire to produce a dashing impression, he acted the man of means to his despairing sister, and treated her and himself to a better supper than he would have afforded himself alone. He had an obscure retreat in a shady part of the city, and, after some hesitation, he took her there, and made her as comfortable as circumstances would admit. For acting thus, he credited himself with admirable generosity; but the truth was that he had conceived a plan whereby Sallie might help him to a comfortable fortune. He did not at once declare it to her; but it promised well, and he had little doubt of its successful realization. Meanwhile, it was indispensable that Sallie should be brought to regard him with the utmost affection and gratitude.

The plan was the old one of robbing the Tisdale Bank. Harold was now more than ripe for the exploit; and the sight of his sister had instantly recalled it to his mind. He persuaded himself that the conditions were especially favorable, and that Sallie would easily be prevailed upon to help him in a way which he had designed, and which did credit to his ingenuity, if not to any other of his virtues. Sallie, according to his arrangements, was to return to Tisdale, and to present herself to her husband in the guise of a returned prodigal. John would receive her with open arms and reinstate her with love and rejoicing in her long lost home. She was to do every thing to secure his confidence, and to persuade him that the future was safe. All this while, however, she was to improve every opportunity of giving information about the routine of affairs at the bank; when large deposits were likely to be on hand, and how and at what moment the safe might most expediently be attacked. When all was ready, she was to act as confederate, furnishing the keys of the doors, and, if possible, of the safe

itself, and taking whatever means might be effective to keep Parmelee out of the way, or at least to disable him from interfering with the operations. When the booty was safely bagged, Sallie should be allowed to accompany her brother in his flight to another land, where they would live together in luxury on the fruits of their achievement.

Nothing was wanting to the execution of this design except Sallie's consent to play her part in it; and Harold spared no pains to win her to his views. He began by assuring her that she was the only human being for whom he still entertained affection, and that there was nothing he would not do to promote her happiness and welfare. He then went on to put an unfavorable construction upon her husband's conduct, who, he asserted, had in the first place married her chiefly with the expectation of receiving a large dowry, and who had subsequently treated her with unpardonable lack of feeling and consideration. He was the secret cause—so Harold averred—of her taking to opium; and he had then harrassed and persecuted her into leaving him. It was

doubtful, in Harold's opinion, whether Parmelee had made any effort whatever to recover her; at all events he had done no more than was necessary to conciliate public opinion. Having thus suggested to her weighty reasons why she should be ready to requite her husband for his injustice and inhumanity, Harold proceeded cautiously and insinuatingly to reveal the means of retaliation which he had provided. So far, Sallie had made little or no resistance to his suggestions; and he brought his argument to a close with every assurance that he had not counted without his host. Nevertheless, he was mistaken.

For some time Sallie was probably unable to grasp the full significance of what he said; for her mind acted feebly and vaguely, and Harold expressed himself in terms the euphemy of which was at first more apparent than their meaning. When at length the truth dawned upon her, she gave him a strange look, but said nothing. He construed her silence as an indication that she wanted to think the matter over before committing herself, and cheerfully acquiesced in her supposed desire,

Accordingly, he put on his hat and went out to attend to his affairs, having previously mentioned the hour at which she might expect his return. It was a long while since he had been in so happy and hopeful a frame of mind; and he went so far as to map out an itinerary for himself during the next few years, and to specify the details of the campaign which he now proposed to undertake against the world, armed with the spoils of the Tisdale Bank depositors. The afternoon passed quickly and pleasantly, and at the appointed hour he returned with a light step to his lodging. He opened the door of the room in which he had left his sister, and which, in his overweening security, he had omitted to fasten; and he found it empty!

Harold had been guilty of more than one miscalculation in the course of his career, but never, perhaps, of one which occasioned him so much surprise and annoyance. It was not only a bitter disappointment—it was a serious peril as well. He had revealed the whole extent of his plan to his sister; and what was to prevent her from going straight to her hus-

band or to the police, and lodging the information? Since she was not with him, he argued, she must be against him; possibly she might have been acting the detective with him all along. These reflections made him so anxious that he finally decided to change his abode until it became evident what Sallie was going to do. "And this," he said to himself, "is my reward for doing a generous action!" He determined never again to make such a fool of himself.

Sallie, meanwhile, harbored no such far-reaching designs as her brother imagined. The assurance of his depravity, coming from his own lips, had overwhelmed her with grief and horror; it made her realize more vividly than any thing had yet done, the depth to which she must have fallen. He would not have ventured to make such a proposal to her, unless he had thought her utterly lost to virtue and honor. She had not been able to make any reply to him; she had neither the nerve nor the will to denounce him; she could only think of the time when they were children together in their nursery, and wonder whether this were really the same world that had seemed so

happy and innocent then. But less than ever could she contemplate the idea of returning to Tisdale and resuming her married life. It seemed to her that the mere fact of having been made the confidant of such a suggestion as Harold's had increased and confirmed her degradation. Her only impulse, therefore, was to get out of the way, and hide herself in deeper recesses of oblivion than ever.

For those who have neither committed crimes nor got money, concealment in a large city is not a difficult matter. Harold did not venture to look for her, and no one else was concerned to do so. If she had walked into the river, no one would have missed her. More than a year passed away. Harold had got over his scare, and had come to the conclusion that Sallie must simply have wandered off in a state of temporary insanity. He blamed himself for not having considered her irresponsible condition, and esteemed himself fortunate in that he had not succeeded in getting her to return to Tisdale. An opium-eater is not a person to whom can be safely entrusted the management of so important a conspiracy.

One day, while passing through a slum in the lower part of the city, he met his sister emerging from an opium-joint, in a condition of partial aberration. She seemed dimly to recognize him, but to retain no memory of what had happened at their last interview. He walked along beside her, and found that she occupied a room in a house contiguous to that in which he himself lodged. He happened to be in funds at the moment, and gave her a dollar toward meeting her expenses. It was just as well, he told himself, to keep on the right side of Sallie; she might be able to do him no good, but she would be the less likely to do him any harm. From time to time, after this, he visited her, and kept a general watch over her movements. In a certain way he was afraid of her; there was something in the dreamy stare of her large dark eyes that he could never frankly meet. There was also a superstitious element in his feeling for her; he had a notion that if she were ever to oppose him in any of his undertakings, he would be certain to fail, and to fail disastrously. Therefore, he always turned his best side toward her, and endeav-

ored to make her associate the idea of him only with what was agreeable. Sallie, for her part, accepted his ministrations, such as they were, in a passive, undemonstrative way, like a person in a fit of pre-occupation. She never spoke about herself or about him, or ventured remarks of any kind; and often she omitted to answer the questions he addressed to her. But at all events she did not betray any hostility toward him; and with this negative attitude he was fain to be content. It certainly did not occur to him that this lost and bewildered sister of his could be watching him, as he was watching her, though from very different motives.

Toward the end of the summer of the year we are concerned with, business had been bad with Harold, and it became necessary to do something vigorous. After going over the ground of all his good, bad and indifferent schemes, nothing seemed to afford a better chance of practical returns than the old plot against the Tisdale Bank. It might not be the time when the largest balance would be on hand; but on the other hand the precautions

against attack would probably be correspondingly lax. The undertaking would be further facilitated by the fact that Harold would be assisted by two experienced craftsmen, with whom he had for some time past been in partnership. He held several deliberations with these gentlemen at his room in the southwest quarter of the city, at which the details of the affair were carefully gone into, and each man's share of the booty determined. Finally, on the evening of the day with which our story opens, the three men boarded their train, and started for the scene of their proposed exploit.

IX.

THE house and the bank now stood empty and unguarded. The night was very dark; the sky was covered with clouds. A few dim street lamps, flickering here and there in the distance, served only to make the broad intervening spaces of shadow seem more black.

No one was abroad; except, perhaps, the new deputy constable, Mr. Richards, who was sauntering slowly down some far-off street, wondering whether any thing would ever happen in Tisdale to give him an adventure and a paragraph in the Tisdale Gazette. Richards was an ambitious young fellow, but zeal seemed thrown away in so peaceful a town as this.

Such a thing as a malefactor of any description had not been seen in Tisdale for a year; even a drunken man was a rarity. As for a burglary, Richards remembered to have heard a tradition of some such thing when he was a boy, but he was far from indulging a hope for

any personal experience of the kind. Locks and bolts were of no use in Tisdale, unless, perhaps, for the bank. But even there they were only a matter of form.

"Why, jest look at it!" said Richards to himself, switching the autumnal leaves away from the path with his cane, and shifting his lantern further up his left arm, "jest look at the way the directors leaves things! What's to prevent Mr. Parmelee, if he had a mind, going off with every blessed cent in the bank, any night of his life? Why, he keeps house in the safe, one might say, with the key in his pocket! It ain't that John Parmelee ever would think of sech a thing; there ain't a better nor a squarer feller in Tisdale; though he has been a bit queer the last year or two; no, it ain't that; it's the principle of the thing! A man's only a man, when all's said; and he hadn't ought to be tempted, even if he can resist it!"

These reflections, perhaps owing to the well-known influence of the mind over the body, had the effect of half consciously leading Mr. Richards in the direction of the bank with which his thoughts were occupied. His foot-

steps echoed along the empty streets, and he felt as much alone in the world as if the judgment day had been yesterday.

At this very time, however, three persons of the kind whose scarcity the deputy constable, ās an ambitious officer, deplored, were proceeding, from another direction, toward the same goal as himself. They had alighted from the New York train, at a station four miles above Tisdale, and were walking, in single file, along the country road leading back to that town.

They walked at a fair pace, but noiselessly, and seldom interchanging a word. The second man in the line maintained a distance of about four yards between himself and the leader, and was as much in advance of him who brought up the rear.

The leader was tall and well made, and was much better dressed than either of his two companions. He wore a silk hat on his head, and carried a light silver-headed cane, which he twirled between his fingers as he stepped along. His gait and bearing showed good breeding; and you would have taken him, had you met him, for a gentleman of leisure, strolling out

for a breath of cool air, in order to sleep the better.

The second man was of a different build and aspect. He was very broad in the shoulders, with thick, bandy legs; and he swung himself from side to side as he walked. His big head, with its bushy hair, was protected by a cloth cap, pulled down over his eyes. His arms were of unusual length, and in his right hand he carried a sort of portmanteau, which, from the way it "chinked" when it struck against his leg, must have contained some metallic objects.

The last man was smaller than either of the others, and of a meager and flimsy frame. He had the air of a broken-down barber who had been on a long spree. He slouched along like a dog with its tail between its legs, frequently glancing behind him; and he carried a dark lantern, with its slide closed.

By and by the little party entered the precincts of the town, and drew near the bank. This stood at the corner of two streets, with a broad vacant space on one side of it. A board fence bounded this space on the street by which they were journeying; and at the hither ex-

tremity of the fence was a large elm tree, the spreading branches of which still retained many of their golden and brown leaves. Beneath this tree the three came to a halt.

"Give me the lantern, Dick," said the tall man to the broken-down barber. "Your beat is between this tree and the bank. If you smell any danger, whistle once, and then over the fence, and meet us at the back."

"How long will you be?" Dick inquired.

"Half an hour at the outside. The safe's twenty years old if it's a day, and I know how to work the lock. Mike," he added, to the broad-shouldered man, "do you follow me with the tools. I shall enter by the kitchen window. All ready?"

"Phwat about the chap in charge?" asked Mike, in a strong brogue. "Will I wring the dirty spalpeen's neck?"

"Not unless he kicks too much. But that'll be all right. He'll be abed and snoring, and will only need a handkerchief down his throat, and his hands tied. As for the kid, she's nothing! We're in for big money, boys! Come on!"

"I ain't easy in my mind yet," said Dick, in a querulous tone. "That there crazy Sal looked too blamed knowin' to suit me. Say, what if she'd tumbled to the game, and split on the whole gang of us?"

"It isn't the crazy ones that make the trouble; it's the fools, like you!" replied the tall man sharply. "There'd be no harm in Sal,—not if she'd been sitting by when we planned the job. Those opium fiends never know any thing anyway, and what they do know they forget the next minute. Besides, Sal knows me, and she wouldn't split on any thing I had a hand in. So keep your eye open and hold your tongue. Come on, Mike!"

The two men got over the board fence, and were immediately lost to sight.

Dick, left to himself, slouched slowly and cautiously down the road toward the bank, pausing at every few steps to look and listen. He had the keen senses of an animal, and a singularly acute intelligence of the instinctive sort; but in other respects he was considerably below the animal level. He acted as a sort of antennæ for his bolder and stronger associates,

and possessed an almost preternatural scent for approaching danger.

It took him four or five minutes to traverse the hundred yards between the elm and the corner on which the bank stood. Having reached this he glanced circumspectly round it, and down the adjoining street.

Nothing was in sight in that direction.

He waited three minutes there, then drew back, and began to retrace his steps toward the elm tree.

Destiny will sometimes defeat the ablest human precautions. If Dick had remained at the corner only ten seconds longer he would have seen the gleam of Mr. Richard's lantern approaching from the other end of the block. As it was, he saw nothing, and therefore gave no alarm ; and the inevitable consequences followed.

He had nearly reached the elm, on his return trip, when the deep stillness of the night was broken by a crash of glass and a sharp explosion. Following these came the harsh whirr of a policeman's rattle.

Dick vaulted over the fence and ran down

the other side of the vacant space. In a moment the thud of hurrying footsteps was heard approaching through the darkness, and Mike and the tall man came plunging forward. and had almost stumbled over Dick before they saw him.

"Did you collar the cash?" was his question.

"No, hang 'em! There was something wrong," replied the tall man, breathing heavily. He held a revolver in his hand, from which he now ejected an empty cartridge and replaced it with a new one.

"Something wrong, eh?" snarled Dick. "Well, what was I tellin' yer? I never had no confidence in this job! What was it?"

"The cashier and his kid were both gone," continued the other; "that looked a little fishy to begin with. However, we got through into the safe all right; but, by the holy poker! it was as empty as your skull. Then Mike, here, must of course drop the jimmy on the floor; and the next thing, up went the window; and, sure enough, if there wasn't a cop, with his shooting iron pointed! I got the drop on him, though; and I guess I winged him! But the

town will be up in another minute, boys, and we must hook it! Each man take his own road, and meet at the second station below, on the east line. There's a train down at three o'clock. So! off we go!"

And this was the end of the famous Tisdale bank robbery!

X.

MEANWHILE, in response to the unprecedented sounds of Mr. Richard's rattle, the neighboring population of Tisdale began to grunt, yawn, and rub its eyes, and to wonder what had broken loose in their peaceful midst. Several bedroom windows in the vicinity were thrown open; and the occupants of one or two of these, which commanded a view of the bank, saw a lantern waved vigorously, and heard a voice vociferating:

"Thieves! Robbery! Murder! Help!"

At first the listeners surmised that a villanous practical joke was perpetrating; but, as the shouts continued, some fancied that they recognized the accents of Mr. Richards, and were reluctantly forced to the conclusion that something was really the matter. Hereupon the boldest among them slipped on their boots, trowsers and overcoats, armed themselves with such weapons as were at hand, and issued forth to do battle with the unknown enemy.

In the course of ten minutes a small group of these amateur defenders of the peace, their numbers slowly augmenting by the arrival of later stragglers, had gathered round the deputy constable, and were eagerly listening to a tale of horror from his lips. Mr. Richards sat upon a wheelbarrow, with his coat off and the left sleeve of his shirt turned up. He had been wounded in the upper part of the arm, and while the wound was being dressed he told his story proudly, yet modestly, as a hero should.

At his suggestion, moreover, a squad of warriors were detailed to pursue the robbers, and drag them back in chains. But, inasmuch as the night was dark, the direction in which the robbers had departed unknown, and the energy and persistence of the pursuers somewhat deficient, no practical results followed from this move.

Better success attended the deputation which went to inform the directors of the catastrophe. Three of these four dignitaries were at home—the president, the venerable Amos Pierson; Mr. Fred Tyrrel, a much younger man, but

reputed to be the wealthiest person in Tisdale; and Dr. Coffin, an eminently respectable individual, but somewhat wanting in originality and vigor of mind. These gentlemen made their appearance in the course of half an hour; and, having surveyed the scene of the outrage, they withdrew with Richards into the seclusion of the bank parlor to compare notes and decide upon their line of action. The rest of the assembled citizens, finding themselves left out in the cold, returned to their several homes, and presumably enlightened their wives as to the history of the night.

"Take a seat, Richards," said Mr. Pierson. "Now, will you oblige us by giving an exact account of what happened, as you saw it, from beginning to end?"

"Well, sir," began Richards, with his mental eye fixed upon the column headed "The Great Bank Robbery," in the forthcoming issue of the Tisdale Gazette, "it was this way: I'd been havin' the bank in my mind, and how nothin' out of the way had ever happened to it, and thinks I, I'll pass by it and take a look. So along I come, just as usual, not expectin' noth-

in', you may be sure. It's all right, says I to myself, of course it is!

"Well, gentlemen, I came along, and I see a wheelbarrow standin' underneath the second window there, that looks into the parlor. It was Pat Donan's wheelbarrow, I guess; he was doin' a job round here yesterday. However, thinks I, I'll just step up on it and take a squint inside. It's a cur'ous thing, gentlemen, the way small accidents sometimes leads the way to important consequences, as I might say."

"Keep to the point, Richards," said Mr. Pierson, impassively.

"I'm at it right now, sir," the deputy constable replied. "I got on top of the wheelbarrow, as I was sayin', and jest as I done so—bringing my head up to about half the height of the lower sash—I hears somethin' fall, and sees the flash of a lantern. I didn't wait for no more; I smashes the window, turns the bolt and throws up the sash. At the same time I grabs for my revolver, and throws the light of my lantern into the room. I hadn't more than done so, gentlemen, when I hears a big noise, and feels a bullet here in my arm.

I drops back'ard off the wheelbarrow; but up again the next minute, and springs my rattle."

"That includes all your personal share in the matter?" inquired Mr. Pierson.

"Well, sir, I done my best," returned Richards, a little crestfallen; "but bein' wounded, you see, and every thin' goin' so quick like—"

"How many persons did you see at the safe?" asked Fred Tyrrel. He was sitting on the table, with one foot touching the floor; and held in his hand a small metal box, which he had picked up in John Parmelee's sitting-room, and which none of the others had noticed.

"I should say there was four or five, sir; but I don't know as I could swear to more nor four, or may be three."

"Could you recognize the faces of any of them?"

"Well, no; not quite that, sir. It was too dark to see any thin' more than the figgers," said Richards, cautiously.

"Did the figures remind you of any one you had ever seen before?"

"Well, sir, one on 'em was a good height—'twas him as fired at me. T'other wasn't so tall. No, I can't say as I have seen 'em before—not to swear to."

"I presume," interposed Mr, Pierson, addressing Tyrrel, "that the object of these interrogatories is to obtain confirmation of the impression (which, I fear, none of us can avoid sharing) that this crime was perpetrated by a man who has for many years enjoyed our unlimited confidence?"

"I expect to confirm my conviction that John Parmelee had nothing to do with robbing this safe," returned Tyrrel, composedly.

"Eh? You surprise me!" the president exclaimed. "Have we not all of us seen that Parmelee is missing? that his bed has not been slept in? and that his daughter is also gone? Considering the juncture at which he has disappeared, could you ask for stronger presumptive evidence that he is the guilty party?"

"To be sure; what could be more presumptive?" added Dr. Coffin.

"Parmelee's absence just now is unfortunate—I don't deny that," replied Tyrrel; "and I

don't pretend to know the cause of it. But I see no reason to believe that it has any thing to do with this robbery. He has been in this bank thirty years, and not a word was ever said against his honesty. I suspect," he added, tapping the metal box in his hand, "that we shall find another explanation of his disappearance."

"Possibly; I should not wonder," assented Dr. Coffin.

"I should rejoice to believe him innocent," said Mr. Pierson; "but, so far, the case looks badly. The coincidence you suggest is rather a violent one. He had free access to the safe; he may have had debts, embarrassments, for all we know; and—"

"Richards, how long have you known Mr. Parmelee?" Tyrrel interrupted.

"Well, ever since I was a boy, sir."

"Had he, to your knowledge, any bad habits?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir—no. Didn't drink; didn't play no cards nor billiards; didn't frequent no loose company. No, sir, John was a good, steady man, so far as I ever see; though

I will say he has been gettin' a bit queer lately. A little off in the head, maybe."

"Exactly!" said Tyrrel, putting the box in his pocket. "Now, how was the safe opened?"

"Skeleton key, sir," answered Richards, producing it from his pocket. "There was a kit of tools, too, but they wasn't needed. 'Twas an old-style lock and easy to pick."

"You see how it is, gentlemen," said Tyrrel, turning to the others. "The cashier of this bank didn't need a skeleton key to open the safe; he didn't need from two to four confederates; and there is nothing to show that he even needed money, Then there's his unblemished character for thirty years. His absence is the only thing against him, and that may have been caused by the very men who planned and carried out this robbery. They would be forced to dispose of him somehow, in any case."

"I trust you may be right," said Mr. Pierson, shaking his head, "but we can not overlook the fact that the skeleton key and the confederates may have been merely blinds, to throw us off the scent. I consider it our duty, as at present advised, to obtain a warrant for his arrest, and

to advertise a reward, also. We owe something to our depositors."

"Quite so!" murmured Dr. Coffin.

"Yes—fifty-seven thousand and odd dollars!" added Tyrrel, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Well, if you two say so, do as you please! By the way, Coffin, what *do* you say?"

"Hum! Well, I hardly—it is difficult to know what to determine," answered the doctor.

"Those are the orders, then, Richards," said Mr. Pierson, buttoning up his overcoat and putting on his hat. "A warrant for the arrest of John Parmelee and $1,000 reward."

"I'll attend to it, sir," said Richards, pensively.

"And so will I attend to it!" said Fred Tyrrel to himself, as he lit a cigar and walked homeward. "I'll follow up my own clew; and we'll see which comes out ahead—those dunderheads or I!"

XI.

THE Tisdale bank robbery took place on a Wednesday night in October. At noon on Thursday a reporter of one of the New York papers alighted at the station, and proceeded to interview every body. At four o'clock he took the down train back, passing on his way the reporters of the other papers, who had got the scent an hour or two later, and on Friday morning the journal with which he was connected published an unique account of the affair, and he deposited an ample check to the credit of his bank account.

The narrative was picturesque and dramatic, and was illustrated by a sketch of the bank building, and a ground plan, showing the communication between the cashier's sitting-room and the bank parlor. There was also a portrait of Mr. Richards, with his left arm in a sling; and another portrait of John Parmelee, the reputed robber. This, however, having

been composed from a verbal description, given by a person not trained to observe accurately, would scarcely of itself have sufficed to insure Mr. Parmelee's recognition.

The cashier's biography was presented in detail; it was told how his maltreatment of his wife had finally led to her disappearance and supposed suicide. Mention was likewise made of their little daughter, Sophie, and it was told how her morals had deteriorated under her father's evil influence, until she had assisted him in his crime, and accompanied him in his flight with the booty.

As an appendix to all this the history of the bank was rehearsed, from the earliest times down to the present day; its prosperity and respectability were celebrated, and the names of its various presidents and directors were enumerated. Finally it was intimated that the police were already on the trail of the criminal, and a copy of the reward of $1,000 for the apprehension of John Parmelee wound up the whole, which occupied three and a half columns on the first page.

An extra size edition was printed to meet the

demand, and the newsdealers and boys did a great business. During the whole of that day the robbery was one of the chief topics of conversation. In the evening there was a report that Parmelee had escaped to Canada.

It was a time of political excitement in New York. There were four candidates for the presidency in the field; and each of the several parties and organizations were holding meetings, capturing voters, and striving in all ways, fair or foul, to convince the public that the integrity of the republic depended upon the election of this or that individual.

Placards of meetings, and lists of appointees for municipal offices, were posted throughout the city. Impassioned orators addressed boisterous audiences; beer saloons and rum shops were crowded with drinkers and talkers, brought thither in cabs chartered by the political managers, and treated free.

Processions with banners and music paraded the streets and obstructed traffic; the city seemed to contain double its usual population; the rough element was holding carnival everywhere, and noise and disorder prevailed.

In seasons such as these, all manner of odd and uncouth characters, who in quieter times keep out of sight, emerge from their slums and hiding-places, and stalk about like uneasy and ominous specters, in broad daylight.

The popular mind, in its excitement and preoccupation, either does not heed them at all, or accepts them as a sort of symbolic incarnation of the omnipresent moral upheaval and unrest, and thus accords them, for the time being, exceptional freedom and immunity. When the atmosphere is serene again, they vanish into their lairs, like obscene reptiles and beasts of prey at the approach of dawn.

Such being the case, it is not to be wondered at that the eccentric tramp who appeared in the upper part of Manhattan Island, on the afternoon of Friday, should have attracted comparatively little attention. He was only one of hundreds more or less outwardly like him.

Nevertheless, to those interested in the vagaries and whimsicalities of human nature, he might have afforded a curious subject of study.

Under more favorable circumstances, he would have looked a personable man enough;

he was of fair height, and well-featured, and his blue eyes were set beneath dark and defined brows. He was a little beyond middle age, though fatigue and hardship made him look not less than fifty. His attire was respectable, but appeared to have suffered temporary defacement, as if he had been up all night, amid untoward surroundings.

A careless observer might have thought him slightly intoxicated; but this was not the case. His extreme pallor, and his sunken cheeks, indicated rather that he was weak from lack of nourishment; and though he wavered occasionally in his walk, the cause was exhaustion, not inebriety.

It was evident, however, that his brain was not in a normal condition. His eyes were bright and restless; a strange variety of expressions flitted continually across his face; and though, at times, he seemed to be looking at something with rapt attention, it was noticeable that his regards were never fixed upon any object visible to other eyes.

Occasionally, he would pass his hand tremblingly over his eyes and mouth, and glance

quickly to the right and left. Again, he would draw himself up with a nervous shiver, smile, nod his head, and make gestures with his arms; his lips moving rapidly the while, as if in active though noiseless conversation. Yet he appeared wholly unconscious of the curious stares of passers-by.

Once, near the upper part of Central Park, at a place where a house was building, he seated himself on a barrel head, and, passing his fingers over the top of a low wall in front of him as if it were the keyboard of a piano, he began to sing, in a quavering voice, a sentimental love song:

> I loved my love last year;
> We met, in the month of June;
> When I kissed her on the mouth
> Love's surprise was in her eyes.
> When we kissed, as earth in drouth
> Kisses the kissing rain,
> Love's music was in tune:
> Now—we shall not kiss again.

A crowd of workmen and loafers collected around him, applauding and laughing. But all at once he stopped, arose, gazed vacantly about, and resumed his way.

In this fashion the unknown tramp gradually made his way down Fifth avenue. It was sunset when he passed the town boundary of Central Park. The voices of the newsboys were heard, crying an "extra!"—"Escape of John Parmelee, the bank robber, to Canada!" The tramp paid no attention to the announcement, even when one of the boys offered him a paper. And yet he ought to have been interested, for he was no other than John Parmelee himself.

Leaving Tisdale near midnight on Wednesday, he had traveled on foot all the distance to New York—more than fifty miles—and during that long journey he had scarcely slept, and had eaten only the apples that he picked up by the wayside.

Opium eaters often exhibit singular powers of endurance, in the way of abstinence from food and continuous exertion; the effect of the drug upon the brain, whether stimulating or sedative, seeming partially to counteract fatigue and exhaustion. But Parmelee had, by this time, nearly come to the end of his artificial support. The double dose he had taken on Wednesday, while making him delirious, had

probably carried him further than he would otherwise have gone; but he had missed his usual supply on Thursday, and was already suffering acute nervous anguish for the want of it. The delusions which haunted him, moreover, would soon clear away, and when he awoke from his insanity to find himself, he knew not how, in a strange place, he would be in danger of total collapse. The phantom of his wife, which had led him so far, would abandon him in the midst of strangeness and hostility.

Meanwhile he strayed onward between the rows of stately houses, noticing them as little as he did the people on the sidewalks. Immersed in the unsubstantial world of his bewildered dreams and fantasies, the solid stone and mortar and flesh and blood of the city were as little real to him as the shadow of a cloud upon a meadow.

As he proceeded southward the avenue became more and more thronged with people, come out to see or to participate in the political demonstrations. They delayed his course, but never altered its direction. With a kind of involuntary persistence he edged through

and round the groups, always with that odd, blank glance sent forward across the spaces in front of him.

A little above Madison Square a dense crowd blocked the street in front of one of the political club-houses. Here the turmoil and excitement were more condensed and positive, and, for the first time, the wanderer seemed to feel something of the contagion.

But, if so, it must have been the vague magnetism emanating from any large concourse of human beings, animated by a common emotion or purpose, rather than any comprehension on his part of the objects in view, or sympathy with them.

Nevertheless, his bearing changed, as if a stimulus were communicated to his nerves. The idea (whatever it was) that dominated his brain flickered up for awhile into new energy.

Arrived at the junction of Fifth Avenue and Broadway, he took the latter route, and presently reached Union Square.

Evening had now set in, and that posthumous life (so to speak) of a great city, which begins after dark, was bestirring itself.

Many people were on their way to theaters and concerts; others were going out to dinner; thieves and footpads were already prowling about, seeking their prey; the newsboys were crying the latest results of the elections, and some, more enterprising than the rest, were driving small carts, from which they distributed their wares.

But the great majority of the citizens were abroad to see and hear what was going on in the streets and squares; to breathe that exciting atmosphere, electric with coming events, of which one always feels the influence at times like these.

The great open space of Union Square was ablaze with electric lamps, glaring down with a harsh white luster upon the dark shifting masses below, and casting hard black shadows upon the pavement. On the southern side a broad platform had been erected and draped with flags; and upon it were collected a group of well-dressed men, with shining hats and black coats, one or another of whom, from time to time, would step forward and address the vast audience in a speech.

Nothing of these harangues was audible beyond a short distance; but the cheering and enthusiasm of those in the immediate vicinity of the speakers was communicated to those further off, so that a continuous, irregular tumult of shouts and cries was always rolling to and fro over the expanse. The intention was accepted for the word, and he was always the most eloquent man who gesticulated most and seemed most thoroughly carried away by his own unheard appeals.

Ever and anon a rocket or a Roman candle would mount whizzing aloft into the empty vault of darkness overhead. There it would pause a moment, then, exploding with a crisp detonation, spread forth a shower of rainbow colored lights.

The next instant, the bright fires would be absorbed into the darkness; the whole display thus furnishing an ironical symbol of the probable careers of those eminent personages whose names were just then most frequent in men's mouths.

In the intervals of the speeches, also, bands of music would thump and crash out

patriotic airs,—a method of firing the popular heart more direct and intelligible, perhaps, than were the efforts of most of the orators.

John Parmelee had now attained to a stage of his delirium, immediately preceding the inevitable final collapse, where he vibrated like a harp-string to every one of these impulses, without comprehending either their origin or their object. He felt a confused desire to throw himself into the current of events, but knew not how to do so.

With the cunning characteristic of the slaves of this form of intemperance, he had for years managed to conceal from his friends and employers the truth as to his condition. But the long strain, latterly so violently augmented, had brought on a crisis, and he was ready upon provocation to break out into any wild, grotesque or extravagant action.

It so happened that the provocation was now to be applied.

There were in the crowd numerous small knots or cliques of men engaged in animated political discussions, and many of the disput-

ants were stimulated by the liquor they had drunk, at one or another candidate's expense, to unusual loudness and recklessness. They were ripe for any frolic or license that chance might suggest to their overheated brains.

John Parmelee got entangled in a group of these amateur debaters, and was addressed by one of them, who demanded his opinion of the question at issue.

Parmelee had, of course, no conception what the question at issue was; but his mind was full of chaotic fragments of famous speeches, by all the historic orators, from Demosthenes down to Webster, which he had been accustomed, in by-gone days, to deliver for the entertainment of Tisdale sociables. Passages from these he now poured forth; and the fire and earnestness with which he expressed himself, so wrought upon his auditors that they failed to perceive the incoherency and inaptitude of what he said.

His personal appearance, moreover, though disheveled and distraught, had a singularity and impressiveness suggestive of a personage of consequence. It was not the first instance,

perhaps, of a madman having been mistaken for a genius and a leader.

One of his hearers, who was more drunk, and therefore, more influential than the rest, proposed that he should be conducted to the platform and allowed to develop his views there. The suggestion was instantly seized upon by the rest, and no time was lost in putting it in execution.

A commotion followed, with outcries, cheers and laughter; there was a confused struggling together of arms and bodies. Those in the vicinity, supposing that a fight was going on, pressed toward the spot from all sides, and the helmets of two or three policemen were seen converging upon the scene of conflict.

Immediately, however, there was a new and sustained pressure in the direction of the platform; and borne aloft on the shoulders of four or five stalwart fellows, was seen the figure of a pallid, excited man, with dark, disordered hair, and glittering blue eyes.

None knew who he was; but every one jumped to the conclusion that he must be some

eminent politician—perhaps even a presidential candidate—with an important message to communicate. The personages already on the platform took it for granted that this irruption among them was in some way authorized, and they greeted him with respect. Meanwhile, the great crowd roared a welcome, and ten thousand voices demanded a speech.

Parmelee stood before them and gazed out upon them, supporting himself with his hands upon the railing. He did not realize the meaning of his position; but he felt the great wave of emotion surging in upon him from that vast assemblage, and his wandering brain caught hold of as wild a notion as ever visited the speculations of insanity. He figured to himself that all these hosts of eager auditors were gathered together out of interest in his private concerns; and that they awaited in breathless suspense the recital of his misfortunes and his hopes. He resolved, therefore, to take them into his confidence; and it was from this absurd and pathetic point of view that he proceeded to address them.

"Fellow-citizens," he began, in a voice which,

though strained and broken, still retained something of its old resonance and melody. "I have suffered—we all have suffered—and, for many years, the night has seemed to hold no promise of a dawn. But I see better days ahead—happier days! The worst is over; the curse is passing away!"

Here he was interrupted by a burst of applause from the multitude, who understood in this exordium a figurative reference to the prolonged domination of a certain political party, and the probability of its being now about to give way to a new administration. The orator stretched out his hand, and silence came again.

"They told me she was dead," he went on, "and that I should see her no more. But I never doubted that she lives still, and that I should find her. I have followed her day and night; I know what she has suffered, for I have had the same suffering. But she is near—I know it; and I shall meet her soon!"

"What is he giving us?" demanded one of the dignitaries on the platform of another.

"It strikes me there's more sentiment than politics in this speech. Who is he, anyway?"

"I give it up!" the other replied. "Ask me an easier one."

"What a day of joy that will be!" cried the speaker, throwing out his arms. "We shall all three be together; there will be no more parting, no more breaking hearts; no more mystery and misery! We shall be happier even than in our first days, for we shall have known what misfortune means; and the song that she and I used to sing together—there will be a new music in it!" And he began to sing:—

> She was warmer than the sunlight!
> She was sweeter than the blossom
> Of the rose that lives in June!
> "I am thine and thou art mine"
> Was our murmur in the twilight!
> She was lovelier than—

The crowd, up to this point, had kept silent; those at a distance in order to catch what was said, and those near by from doubt what was meant. But the love ditty broke the spell. There was an uproar such as had not

been heard that evening. Half in resentment, half in derision, the shouting masses swayed to and fro, and, in another moment, might have stormed the platform and brought disaster to all upon it.

But the dignitaries recognized their peril, and lost no time in indicating their innocence by ridding themselves of the offender.

A couple of them seized him by the arms and dragged him to the head of the flight of steps descending from it. Here a brief struggle took place, ending in the unknown sentimentalist being thrust over the edge of the scaffolding and falling on the heads and shoulders of the dense mass below.

His fall was somewhat broken thereby ; and the catastrophe was hailed with yells of laughter. Meanwhile, poor John Parmelee, bruised and half stunned, was rapidly hustled to the outskirts of the crowd, and there left to take care of himself.

XIII.

WHEN Black Hal and his friends met, after their tramp across country, on the early morning train to New York, they were none of them in a particularly good humor. They were tired, hungry, and sleepy; and they had nothing but their labor for their pains. Moreover, they had met with a number of petty misfortunes, more irritating, if anything, than the great ones. Dick, in getting over a wire-barbed fence in the dark, had torn his tight pantaloons from the waist-band to the knee—a most unsightly gash, which there were neither pins nor needle and thread at hand to heal. Mike had strayed into a swamp, which had not let go of him until after drawing one of his boots off his leg; after which he had trod with his unprotected foot on a fragment of a soda-water bottle, and cut himself to the bone. Harold, for his part, had got on without a mishap until the very moment when he was mount-

ing the steps of the railway car. In the act of springing upward he had snapped his silver-headed cane in two, and the jolt this had given him had caused his silk hat to fall off. So all three were the worse for wear, when they met together in the smoking-car.

In order to avoid suspicion, they at first behaved as if they were strangers to one another; but finally Dick produced a pack of cards, and requested the others to join him in a game of cut-throat euchre. This harmless subterfuge served to give them an opportunity of relieving their minds.

"This is a sweet boon, this is!" said Dick, bitterly. "I might have afforded to lose the pants, if I'd had any thin' to stick in the pockets. The first cop wot sees me on the streets will run me in for indecent exposure! I never did go in for these out o' town jobs, anyhow!"

"We've all of us put one foot in it," remarked Harold, with a shrug of his shoulders; "especially Mike here," he added, with an ironical smile at the taciturn Irishman.

"Faith, if iver oi come across the white-liv-

ered villain as was beforehand wid' us at the safe, oi'll dhrink his dhirty blood!" growled the latter between his teeth.

"I only wish I were certain who he is," said Harold. "You might keep his blood, if I could get my hands on his boodle! I don't see my way clear through this confounded business yet."

"Who he is be blowed!" retorted Dick. "Where he is is wot I'm after!"

"'Tis the chap what kept the bank—you knows him better than we does!" Mike said to Harold in a surly tone, as he stuffed some tobacco into his short black pipe, and lighted it.

"It certainly looked like it," Harold replied; "but though there's no love lost between my brother-in-law and me, I must say I have never given him credit for so neat a stroke of business as this. He's been in that bank all his life-time; and if he was ever going to go through it, why should he have hit upon the very same evening that we had laid our pipe for? Such coincidences don't often happen."

"Had the safe been cracked before you got to it?" Dick inquired, shuffling the cards.

"If it had, it was done with a key, and no

force used; the bolt was shut and the lock was sound; but the safe was empty all the same, and my brother-in-law was not at home, as I told you."

"Some blamed fool has been an' squealed on us—that's what it is!" Dick affirmed, scowling.

"That's all nonsense! Who was there to squeal? The thing has never been spoken of except when we three were together, and you know as well as I do that nobody could have overheard us."

"Then why wasn't the stuff there? I ask yer that," returned Dick, angrily.

"I know no more than you do about that. But suppose, if you like, that my brother-in-law did find out in some way that we were coming, why should that put him up to doing the trick before us? Why shouldn't he have given the tip to the bank directors, and bagged the whole gang of us? He must have known that if he collared the cash and cleared out, suspicion would fall on him, and they would be after him hot-foot. But if they nabbed us he would get all the credit, and probably a snug bonus by way of testimonial into the bargain. No, I don't see it in that way."

"We've been beat anyhow—I see that plain enough!" muttered Dick. "Mebbe they just took the money out theirselves so as to fool us," he presently added.

Harold shook his head. "If they knew enough to fool us, they'd have known enough to capture us, too," said he. "We're off the track, I tell you. It's a puzzle whichever way you look at it. All we know for certain is that the safe was empty. The cashier may have done it, though I don't think so. The officers of the bank may have done it in the ordinary way of business, though I never heard of such a thing before. Or some third party may have done it without either the bank or we knowing any thing about it; but that's the least likely of all; and besides, how happened it that John and his daughter were not at home? Well, perhaps we'll find out more when the thing gets into the papers. Meanwhile, I'm going to stretch out and take a bit of a nap."

So saying, the captain of the burglars turned over a seat, and established himself in a diagonal attitude, with his head in one corner and his feet in the corner opposite. Dick and Mike,

after grumbling together for a while, followed his example. The train sped along through the night, and toward morning it deposited them in New York about four hours later than the time at which Sophie had arrived on her lonely quest for her father.

This was Thursday, and the reporter's account of last night's proceedings had not yet got into his paper. Harold got into a cab and was driven to a hat store, where he replaced his lost head-gear; the two other men proceeded down town on a Third Avenue horse-car. Harold, with the solicitude for his physical condition which was characteristic of him, took a bath, and then rolled himself up on the sofa in his room and went to sleep. It was late in the afternoon when he awoke, feeling refreshed and with a good appetite. He had about twenty dollars in his pocket. He went to a good restaurant and ordered the best dinner on the menu, with a pint of light claret to wash it down. After sitting a while, and glancing over the evening paper, he left the restaurant and strolled out on Broadway to take the evening air, and to think over his present situa-

tion in a deliberate and unimpassioned manner.

He was about thirty-five years old, and in the prime of his mental and bodily powers. He had had a wide experience of men and affairs, and, with industry and persistence, he might succeed in any avenue of employment. Many men had started with much less efficient capacity than his, and had risen to honor and power. It was only a matter of a few years. Why should he not try it?

On the other hand, should he continue his present mode of life, he was certain sooner or later to end in disgrace and ruin. In quiet moments he admitted this: society always prevails against its enemies in the long run. He would be caught, tried, convicted, and that would be the end. What, then, was the use of mortgaging all the future part of his life for the sake of the few intervening years—or it might be months—of perilous and problematical enjoyment? Moreover, at the best, the enjoyment was only momentary, while the peril was constant. And then, how sordid the conditions were! Were Dick and Mike the sort

of companions that a man of education and ancestry like himself should be compelled to fraternize with? In half a dozen years at furthest, if he directed his course aright, he might be associating with the best people and the most enlightened minds in America. Why not take that course now?

"It is all very easy to talk," said Harold to himself at this point, "and the logic is all correct enough. But when it comes to trying it on practically it's different. Suppose I agree to throw over all this crooked business, how am I to begin on the new tack? I have fifteen dollars in my pocket at this moment. If I set to work, and had ordinary luck, I might find employment, say, in a month. Well, and what would I be living on in the meanwhile? And then, suppose I shouldn't find it in two months or in six! But if the Tisdale Bank had been all right, I should have made may be a hundred thousand dollars in ten minutes: and to-morrow I may get on to something quite as good.

He had by this time arrived at the junction of Broadway and Fifth Avenue; and as he paused on the corner, awaiting a chance to

cross between the procession of carriages, he felt a hand laid on his shoulder, and looking round, saw a man whom he had known some years before, but whom he had latterly lost sight of. He was a person of good connections and prospects, and his name was Sherman.

"Halloo, old fellow," Sherman said, "I knew it was you by the way you walked! How are you? Where are you stopping? How does the world use you? I've been down in Mexico for the last three years—only got back a month ago. What are you doing nowadays?"

"Oh, nothing particular," replied Harold, nonchalantly: I was just wondering what I should do."

"The same old sixpence as ever, I see!" rejoined Sherman, with a laugh. "You never were much of a glutton for work. But I always said, and I believe it still, that if you were once to take hold in earnest, there's nobody could get ahead of you! You've got brains, and you're a manager. I wish I had you with me down in Mexico. There's millions down there for the right sort of men. I'm off again next week. It's hard work, but it's worth it! I

suppose you've got money enough—you always look as if you had: but if you want to lay up a big fortune in a few years chip in with me, and I'll show you how to do it! Look here, have you any engagement this evening? Then come up to my room and smoke a cigar, and we'll have a talk about it."

Harold followed his friend to his apartment in one of the neighboring hotels. There were a couple of rooms, sumptuously furnished, and full of objects that showed the habit of luxurious comfort. He sat down in one of the comfortable arm-chairs, and accepted a cigar from the box which Sherman tendered to him. The cigar was of the best brand. On a small table were cut-glass decanters and glasses. In the window was a secretary, with a green-baize writing desk, and a score of pigeon-holes; it was littered with papers and writing materials, and Harold especially noted a thick check-book, about one third used. There were also a little sheaf of bank notes, and heaped up on them a handful of gold eagles and double-eagles. An open piano stood in one corner. On the center-table was a large map of Mexico, partly un-

folded. Photographs of Mexican buildings and scenery were disposed here and there. Books, mostly, it seemed, of a statistical nature, were piled up on the floor beside the secretary. The door into the bed-room stood open, and through it were visible a silk-lined velvet smoking-jacket thrown over a chair, a pair of morocco slippers with peaked turn-up toes, and a dressing table with a plate-glass mirror and brushes with backs of carved ivory. Over all was an atmosphere of good breeding, prosperity and business energy.

"You see," said Sherman, throwing himself down in a chair and rubbing one hand through his short brown beard, while he smiled pleasantly, "I'm all upside down here; but I'm always that way, and the only redeeming feature is, that I know my way through my own disorder. But my affairs are getting too many for me and I need somebody to take hold and help. An ordinary secretary won't do; I want one of character and judgment, with capacities as good or better than my own; a fellow that I can associate with confidentially—a friend. I have been wishing for the last three or four days that

I could find such a fellow; and upon my word, Blackmer, I feel inclined to look upon you as a sort of Providential answer to my prayer. You know me; you know the sort of man I used to be. I used to knock about with the boys, and drive a fast horse, and dine at Delmonico's, and go to Niblo's and the Casino, and all that sort of thing. I thought as long as I had money enough, I didn't want any thing else. But one day I struck a streak of bad luck, and the first thing I knew, I was left with hardly five thousand dollars to my name. That was three and a half years ago. I had a week or so of the worst kind of blues. My first idea was to borrow money of somebody—nobody knew then how hard I was hit—and try to pull up again by betting and speculating and that sort of thing. There were plenty of fellows would have lent me any amount. But then I thought that would be rather a shabby game to play, and I finally gave it up. Then I had a scheme to buy government land out West and start a farm and grow up with the country. But I didn't know the first thing about farming, and I would never be a good hand at sitting

down quietly and waiting for the seasons to come and behave themselves; I want to be on the go all the time. However, I might have come to that in time, if I had'nt fallen in with a man who began to talk Mexico to me, the same way I'm talking it to you now. He showed me what there was to be done there, and asked me if I had the grit to go in. He said, now was the time, because, in a dozen years from now, when the right man got hold of the government down there, there would be a rush for the place, and there wouldn't be enough to go round. Well, I didn't take much to the idea; it seemed an outlandish country to bury one's self in; and I didn't know much more about mining and engineering than I did about farming. Still, I was certain of novelty and occupation, and it could do no harm to try it; and to make a long story short, I made up my mind to go in. And by George, it was the luckiest decision, from every point of view, that ever I made in my life!"

"You found it paid, did you?" said Harold, who had been listening with attention.

"It paid, pecuniarily and otherwise. As

for the money, you have no idea—few people have—of the wealth that is to be got out of that country. You can pick up an ample income on the surface of the ground; but if you bring science and machinery to bear, you can do any thing! But that isn't all; it's a most delightful place to be in. It's as new as our prairies, and yet as old as Europe or India. You feel like a Columbus, and like Macaulay's New Zealander, at the same time. And it keeps a man alive; he lives all through his brain and his body. You remember what a pale, languid, flabby-muscled creature I was four years ago. Look at me now! I've got the complexion of a sailor and the brawn of an athlete, and I'm in the best of spirits and condition from one year's end to another. I wouldn't have missed the experience for all I'm worth twice over!"

"How long do you intend to keep it up—this Mexican business?" Harold inquired.

"That's a point I wanted to speak to you about. I've laid the foundations, and set every thing a-going; all that has to be done now, is to keep it up. But in order to do that properly, it is necessary that I should begin to spend

most of my time here—at this end of the line—while some one on whom I can depend attends to things down there. So my proposition (assuming that you think you would care to enter into the matter at all) is this: I will take you with me to Mexico next week, and we'll spend six months together, and I'll teach you whatever there is to be taught—no fear but you'll learn it fast enough—faster than I did. Then I'll leave you there, to carry on our operations, while I come back to New York. In three years from now, you and I will have the inside track of every thing there is going in the way of commerce between this country and Mexico; and if you should desire to settle down there, I dare say you might succeed Porfirio Diaz one of these days, as President of the Republic.

XIV.

HAROLD maintained a composed demeanor all this while, but, in truth, he was not a little moved by this unexpected adventure. It fell out so opportunely with his immediate want, as to seem something more than a coincidence. It was evident that Sherman had heard nothing of the darker passages of his career; he supposed him to be merely an idle man about town, with no object in life, but with abilities to fit him for an active and eminent existence. And the course he proposed could not have been better suited to the requirements of a man in Harold's position. For, were he to attempt to begin a new life in New York, he would be hampered and crippled by the presence of many members of the criminal classes, who knew his history; not to mention the police, who had his photograph and biography in their books. He would have to live down his past, before he could enter upon his future;

and that would be a matter of years, and perhaps might fail altogether. But this plan at once freed him from the shadows of what had gone before, and admitted him at a single step to the sunshine and liberty of a better life. The prospects of success were as brilliant and almost as prompt as the best he could hope for in his present course; and there was none of the attendant drawback of danger, disgrace and punishment. It seemed to Harold that if he had been asked to choose the destiny that would, on the whole, be most agreeable to his talents and aspirations, he would have selected precisely that which was now being offered to him.

"The scheme certainly doesn't look bad, as you state it," he remarked coolly. "Of course, however, something would depend, so far as I'm concerned, on the kind of arrangements you would want to make from the financial point of view. I'm not a millionaire, exactly, and I couldn'd affort to risk the little I have——"

"Oh, I don't want you to bother yourself about that—of course not!" Sherman inter-

rupted. "If you were a stranger, I might ask for a guarantee of some kind, just as a matter of form; but as it is, the favor would be quite as much on your side as on mine, and I should require nothing but your consent to co-operate with me. If you want to put any capital into the business, you are at liberty to do so, and you will receive whatever profits may accrue from it. But my idea was, to pay you a salary, —say, to begin with, a couple of hundred dollars a week,—and then, later on, when you got the hang of the work, and saw how the land lay, you could come in for a share of the whole thing. So, if you didn't like it after all, you could step out, and be just where you were when you started. Well, how does it strike you?"

"Well, it seems to me I should like it. I think it will just about suit me," replied Harold, as if weighing his words. "I'm fond of a city life, of course,—the comforts and all that; it's what I'm most used to. But I've been out West, and knocked around a little here and there, and I know enough about that sort of thing to believe that I wouldn't die of a broken

heart even in Mexico. Seriously, I'm not half sorry of an opportunity to strike out in a new line, and find out whether I've got any thing in me,—next week, did you say?"

"Yes; Monday or Tuesday. Though, if that's too short notice for you, I might—"

"No; oh, no; this is Thursday; I guess I can cut myself loose from New York in three days, if I can do it at all. Yes, and the sooner the better. Monday be it!"

"Good! it's a go!" exclaimed Sherman, throwing away the stump of his cigar, and rising with animation. "Stay and dine with me this evening, and we'll go over the ground thoroughly together, so that you may get a clear idea of what is to be done. To-morrow you can begin your preparations."

They talked until midnight; and when Harold got up to leave, the prospects of a new life seemed clear and certain. At parting, Sherman asked him what would be his address in the mean while?

"Let me see!" replied Harold, somewhat disconcerted,—for he was by no means anxious to have his friend discover any thing about his

present whereabouts. "I am just moving out of my old quarters," he went on, "and I was thinking of visiting a friend out of town. I shan't have any fixed address. But I shall drop in to the hotel here to-morrow, and if you are not in, you might leave a line for me with the clerk; at any rate, you know, I shall be on hand on Monday. So—*á bientôt!*"

"Good by, my dear fellow," said Sherman, grasping his hand heartily; and they separated.

On his way homeward, Harold could not help a grin of amusement at the thought of how his friend's manner toward him would have changed, had he known more of his true character; and this led him to the reflection that, after all, the favor was done not to himself, but to a Harold who existed only in Sherman's imagination. It follows, that the real Harold had no reason to feel gratitude for it. "I shall owe him nothing," he told himself; "he is just like the rest of the world,—a snob and a time-server. He thinks he will gain something by getting me to join him, and so he does it. If he thought I needed help, he would see me damned before he'd give it. I'm

not bound to feel under any obligations to him; there are none. If he were to learn, at any moment, what my past life has really been, he would send me packing the next day. Well, then, if I ever find myself in a position to benefit myself at his expense, I shall have a perfect right to do it. So long as his interests and mine are identical, well and good; but if ever they clash, he must go to the wall. No use having any sentiment about this thing. We're each looking out for ourselves, and the best man wins!"

Having thus eased his mind of the momentary apprehension, that it was conceivable that any one could do a kindness to another from a merely disinterested and generous motive. Harold felt more cheerful than ever, and went to bed and to sleep with a light heart. He was still asleep when a peculiar knock on the door aroused him; it apprised him that one of his confederates awaited admission.

"I shall have to play these fellows," he muttered to himself, as he arose and prepared to admit the visitor. "If once they should catch an inkling of my compact with Mr. Frank

Sherman, good-by to Mexico and its mines and millions for good and all!"

He opened the door, though not yet loosening the chain which fastened it. But when he saw Dick standing without, he slipped the bolt, and suffered him to enter.

"What brings you abroad so early?" he demanded, in no very genial manner.

Dick had put on another pair of trowsers, which, if not of the latest fashion, at any rate answered the purpose of covering his lean and misshapen shanks. For the rest, he was as shabby and ill-favored as usual; and Harold, as he glanced at him, mentally contrasted his aspect, and all the depraved and underground mode of life which he symbolized, with the elegance and prosperity that characterized Sherman; and he thanked fortune that he was about to cut loose from the former and henceforth enjoy the latter.

But Dick's wizened visage wore an eager and excited expression, and it was evident that his presence was not accidental nor aimless. He had some communication of importance to make. After Harold had closed the door and

replaced the chain, Dick pulled a morning newspaper out of his pocket, and handed it to his host in silence, but with a nod of the head that meant a great deal.

"Well, what's this for?" Harold inquired, unfolding the paper and glancing over it carelessly.

"It's on the first page," replied Dick, in a voice husky with emotion; "first page, right hand column!"

Harold turned to the place indicated. "Halloo!" murmured he, as his eye caught the heading of the article. "Sure enough!" He sat down on the edge of the sofa-bedstead, and began to read intently. Dick stood watching him, his hand wandering nervously over his mouth and chin. Three minutes passed, and then Harold threw the paper aside, and looked straight before him, his eyebrows drawn together in thought. He seemed to have forgotten Dick. Indeed, his mind was taking a very wide and rapid voyage.

"Say, are you goin' to sleep agin?" Dick exclaimed, at length, with some impatience.

Harold glanced up at him, and drew a long

breath. "Not till I've got to the bottom of this thing," he replied, after a pause. "If John Parmelee has committed that burglary, and has a head on his shoulders, and the money in his pocket, it's ten to one he isn't far from where we're sitting at this moment. That's a little more than human nature can stand. If John hadn't put on such virtuous airs all his life, and pretended that butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, I might have been willing to own up that he'd beaten me, and to let him have the benefit of it. But as it is, I'm blessed if I don't get after him, and make him shell out! He took an unfair advantage of us, and that's why he got ahead. We must get even with him, and not lose any time about it either!"

"Well, now you're talkin'," said Dick, with a mollified air. "Them's my sentiments, to a dot! But how we're to get our claws on him is what I want to know. It ain't so easy."

"Where's Mike?" asked Harold, abruptly, after another pause.

"He ain't showed up this mornin'" was the reply. "He was boozin' last night, when I left him."

"All right; let him alone, then," said Harold. "If he doesn't catch on to the new deal, I don't know as we're obliged to put him up to it. That other affair is past and done with, and this is on another tack altogether. It will be just as easy to divide the boodle into two parts as into three; and it will be so much the more for those that divide it. Isn't that so?"

"That won't prevent Mike from cuttin' up rough when he finds it out," replied Dick, dubiously.

"He needn't find it out; and if he does—why, it can't be helped, that's all." Harold's motive in thus excluding Mike from participation in the expected windfall was two-fold: Not only would his share be larger, but there would be one person the less possessing the knowledge that he had taken the proceeds of the burglary. It was desirable, in any case, to confine such knowledge to as few people as possible; but especially so in this instance, when he contemplated beginning a new life with Sherman.

It will be perceived that Harold had

no intention of foregoing the latter project. He calculated that he would probably be able to get hold of John Parmelee before Monday morning; and that the sum of money which he would extract from him, whether larger or smaller, would be so much to the good—an agreeable nest-egg for future occasions. As to the moral aspect of such a transaction, he did not trouble himself; for although he had come to the conclusion that, with Sherman's assistance, honesty would be the best policy, he still considered himself free to take occasional excursions in the opposite direction, when the omens were propitious.

With respect to Mike, he was a difficult person to manage, and though useful in an emergency where personal strength and courage were necessary, he was rather an incumbrance in enterprises which depended for success on brains and ingenuity. As he could neither read nor write, it was quite possible that he would remain ignorant of the story of John Parmelee's exploit until Harold was on his way to Mexico; and to what might happen after that, Harold was, of course, indifferent.

He and Dick now took a hasty breakfast together, and arranged their plan of operations. If Parmelee were (as they inferred) an old hand at the business, he would probably have recourse to certain places well known to the thieving fraternity of New York, to dispose of such part of his plunder as was not already in the form of cash. Upon such places, therefore, they determined to keep a watch; and meanwhile Harold, to whom alone Parmelee was known by sight, would be on the lookout for a chance meeting in the streets. Upon this basis of procedure they set forth.

But although they pursued their game all day long, they did not succeed in so much as getting upon the scent of it. None of the "fences" had seen any signs of the person they wanted, and none of the customary resorts of social vermin contained him. Harold began to fear that either he had transacted his affairs the previous day, before the fact of the robbery was published; or else that he had betaken himself elsewhere than to New York. The apprehension was strengthened by the rumor in the evening papers that Parmelee had

escaped to Canada. The day seemed destined to turn out an unlucky one; and to add to his annoyance, Harold had been unable to find time to call at the hotel to see Sherman, or to get any message that might have been left for him.

Toward evening, in company with Dick, he found himself in Union Square, where, as we have seen, the great political meeting was being held. He was just considering how he might best get rid of Dick, when they were encountered by Mike, whom they had hitherto successfully avoided. He accosted them, and while they were talking together, their attention was attracted by a turmoil in the throng at a little distance from them, and which seemed to surge in the direction of the platform.

XV.

IT so happened that among the many thousands that witnessed John Parmelee's ejection from the platform, there were two who knew and recognized him. One of them was a tall, handsome, fashionably dressed fellow, with a silk hat on his head and a silver-headed cane in his hand. Two other men were near him—a broad shouldered, bandy legged ruffian, with a cloth cap pulled over his eyes, and a flimsy, shabby scamp, with meager jaws and a wide, hungry mouth.

When John was first uplifted into his short-lived distinction, these three companions were pushing their way about in the throng, with no particular object in view. But the moment the tall man caught sight of the face of the orator, he started and touched one of his followers on the arm.

"Look there!" he exclaimed. "D—n me, if there isn't our man now!"

"What's that?" returned Dick, peering about.

"My precious brother-in-law, I tell you! There, on the platform! What the devil can be the meaning of it? He must be drunk or crazy, one of the two!"

"Been spreeing it with the Tisdale boodle, I expect," Dick remarked.

"But the fellow's mad, to show up that way, when the cops are after him!"

"Phwat be yez jawin' about?" demanded Mike, who was a man of few words.

"That comes of not subscribing to the newspapers!" the other replied. "Do you see that chap up there? Well, he's the man who cleaned out the Tisdale safe ahead of us, and got off with the plunder. They're hunting for him everywhere, from Montreal to Florida; and here he's spouting politics in Union Square! Hanged if I see his game!"

"There's a thousand dollars for the one as spots him!" said Dick, licking his chaps.

"Bad 'cess to him! let's grab him 'an run him in!" proposed Mike, making a step forward.

"Hold on, you d——d fool!" exclaimed the

tall man, catching him by the arm. "Don't you see we can do fifty times better than that? He must have the boodle with him, or know where it is; and if we can get hold of him and fetch him up to the crib, its hard lines if we don't squeeze the whole thing out of him.—Hullo! They're firing him off the platform, now! He's drunk, for dead sure!—'Honest John' they called him! I always knew he was a screw and believed he was a scamp, and now I know that, too! Come on, lads! Here's a new deal, after all, and we hold trumps!"

While Harold Blackmer and his pals were carrying out their scheme, the other person who knew John Parmelee was trying to get to him, from very different motives.

She was a little, sallow-cheeked girl, about fourteen years of age, plainly but decently dressed, and carrying a black satchel in her hand.

Sophie, after leaving home in search of her father, had walked down to the station, which she reached just as a train came in. She got into it without buying a ticket or asking where it would take her. When the conductor came

along, however, and asked whether she were bound to New York she said yes, and paid her fare thither, and in the course of a couple of hours she was set down in the Grand Central depot.

She had never been in New York before and had no idea what to do. But the porter who helped her out of the car happened to be a married man, and to have lately lost a little daughter about Sophie's age; so he took her home with him to spend the night, satchel and all, little suspecting what a fortune was thus introduced beneath his roof.

Sophie slept soundly till ten o'clock the next morning; when she awoke, the porter's wife gave her a breakfast; but, when the child offered twenty-five cents to pay for her entertainment, the woman kissed her with tears on her cheeks, gave the money back to her, and told her she might live there always if she would. Sophie thanked her heartily, and promised if she did not find her papa that day, to come back again in the evening.

"Sure, then, honey, ye'd as well lave yer bag here the while," said the woman, as Sophie

grasped it and prepared to depart, "'tis too heavy for the likes o' you to be carryin'!"

"I should like to, but I musn't," Sophie replied. "I promised my papa I would not."

"God send ye good luck, then, darlint!" said the woman; and Sophie marched off.

All that day she walked about New York looking for her papa, and never parting from the heavy satchel, which contained money enough to support her in the lap of luxury for a dozen years. But it was a burden to her in a more literal sense than a large fortune is commonly supposed to burden its possessor. It was a heavy-hearted business, making her way through the clattering, roaring streets, crowded with faces that were unknown to her, amid which she sought in vain for the one that was dearer to her than all the world.

Sometimes a brawny policeman would ask her whether she had lost her way. Sometimes a lady in a crape veil would look compassionately at her. Sometimes an idle boy would screech suddenly in her ear to startle her. But, for the most part, she was unnoticed. Meanwhile, the money in her pocket was reduced to

less than two dollars; and unless her search were successful on the morrow she bade fair to to be left penniless with her fifty-seven thousand dollars in bank-notes and securities.

Many a time her heart sank and her lips quivered with loneliness and grief. After all, it was but one chance in a thousand that the father she sought was within a hundred miles of her. It was a mere chance—or an instinct at most—that had led her to New York. But she was not old enough to realize the odds against her; and she was young enough to believe that God would guide her, if He thought best.

That night she spent at the house of her friend, the porter's wife; and the next morning she set forth again. The day was a repetition of the former one. Toward evening she found herself, almost tired out, in the lower part of Broadway. But as she approached Union Square her flagging spirits revived; she had a feeling that her wanderings were near their end.

The current of the crowd was setting northward, and she went with it willingly, sure that

she was being led aright. She arrived in the square a moment after her father had made his appearance on the platform, and stood, conspicuous to all eyes, in the glare of the electric lamps.

This strange spectacle did not surprise her; it seemed to be what she had been expecting. In the shout of the multitude she heard the mighty echo of the joy that filled her own heart, and her own little voice mingled in the stentorian acclaim: "Papa, papa, I am here; let me come to you!"

She tried to force her way toward him, but she might as well have striven to pass through a rock. The crowd poured around her and over her, and hurried her now this way, now that; she was jostled breathless, helpless; she would have fallen had there been room to fall; and to have been cast beneath those trampling, heedless feet would have been instant death.

But through it all she did not cease to call for "Papa, papa!" nor did her small fingers relinquish their hold upon the satchel which contained the trust confided in her.

All at once she saw emerging from the

throng three men supporting a fourth, and dragging him along with him. It was her father; but how lifeless and ghastly he looked! She summoned all her strength, and called to him once more. She fancied he heard her; for an instant his face was turned toward her.

The next instant he was swept out of her sight, and a chance blow on her head from some rude elbow dizzied her brain. Darkness filled her eyes; she felt herself falling.

As she dropped to the pavement, a policeman, who happened to be in the right place at the right time, saw her and caught her up in his arms. She appeared to be stunned, but not seriously hurt. What was to be done with her?

His eye happened to light upon a small cart, driven by a small boy, which was just then standing by the curb. It was one of those newsboy's carts, already alluded to, chartered for the purpose of selling the extra editions; and its owner, having sold out his consignment, had paused on his way home to enjoy the spectacle of free institutions in active operation.

"Hi! sonny," said the policeman, laying the still insensible form of the little girl down in the bottom of the cart, "take her to the station round the corner and give her in charge to the boss. He'll tip you a quarter, may be. Off you go! Hold up! Here's a bag belongs to her I guess." And he tossed in, as a careless after-thought, the fifty-seven thousand dollars.

The newsboy contemplated his involuntary passenger, as she lay there, and took a fancy to her. He slipped the satchel beneath her head, to serve as a pillow; whipped up his horse, and drove away.

But instead of taking her to the station-house, he kept along down Broadway as far as Canal street, and then turned off to the right.

XVI.

WHEN Sophie came fully to herself again, she was vaguely surprised to find herself gazing at the dirty and dilapidated ceiling of a low room, imperfectly illuminated by the flickering light of an ill-smelling little lamp.

She raised herself on her elbow and looked about.

There was nothing in the room that could properly be called furniture. She was lying in one corner, upon a mattress improvised out of pieces of sail cloth laid upon straw. Upon a similar heap of bedding, in another corner, was stretched the shabbily attired figure of an elderly woman, whose face was partly concealed beneath the folds of a ragged shawl, and whose eyes were closed.

A couple of boards laid across two soap boxes served for a table, and a coil of rope beside it may have answered the purpose of a chair. The walls were destitute of paper, and

the discolored plaster had fallen off in several places, showing the laths underneath. Altogether, Sophie had never before seen so unlovely an apartment as this.

While she was wondering where she was, and how she came there, the door opened and a boy about twelve years old entered.

He was barefooted, and his clothing was elementary and ragged. His red hair thrust itself through the hole in the crown of his cap, but his dirty, freckled face was good-humored and clever, and when he met Sophie's eyes his mouth widened in a broad smile. He carried in his hand a bundle of something, done up in a bit of newspaper.

"Hello! how was yer?" he said, in a tone husky with the calling of many newspapers, but cheerful and kindly. "I know'd as yer was more scar't nor hurt—and more hungry nor scar't, mebbe! Dat's all right! Here—catch on to a bite of dis, and you'll be chipperer nor a sparrer!"

So saying, he squatted down cross-legged beside her, and unfolded the contents of the bundle. There was a Frankfort sausage, a

dozen sea biscuits, and a piece of cheese. He also produced a couple of apples from his trowsers pockets, with the remark, "Them's dessert."

He then took the board-and-soap-box table to pieces, and reconstructed it in a position accessible to both Sophie and himself. Upon this he spread the feast, with the newspaper for a table-cloth. A battered tin can half full of water represented the beverages.

"Dere we is!" he exclaimed; "fine ez Delmonico! Jump in an' gorge yourself, little gal! Ef yer sees what yer don't want, ax for it!"

"Do you live here?" Sophie inquired.

"You bet I does," answered the boy, with a nod of satisfaction. "Ain't this room a daisy!" There ain't many of der boys has got der match of it, and don't yer forgit it! I'se had hard times myself but I makes money now, I does."

"How do you make money?" asked the little girl, who began to feel a liking for her host.

"Sellin' papers, ter be sure. I shined boots oncet, but dat ain't nothin' to papers. Yer buys 'em so much off, an' yer sells at reg'lar

prices, same as der chaps on Wall street, an yer pockets der odds. Say, I earnt mos' two dollars ter day, an' I got fifteen dollars in der bank."

"What is your name?" was Sophie's next question.

"I'se called Bob," he replied, "an' a good 'nough name, too! What's yours?"

"Sophie. Do you know where my papa is?"

"Got a pa, have yer? No, I don't know nothin' 'bout him. What is he?"

"He's the cashier of the bank. He went away night before last, and I came after him. I saw him yesterday on the platform in the big square. And then three men had hold of him and I fell down."

"Dat feller?" exclaimed Bob staring, with his mouth full of cheese and sausage. "Sort er pale an' wild lookin'? Why, I seed him! Dem fellers as had holt on him was Black Hal an' his gang. Dat your pa? Well, a nice lot he goes with, for a cash'er! What's he call hisself, anyhow?"

"His name is John Parmelee," said Sophie, in a tone meant to rebuke her companion's levity.

Either the tone or something else certainly did produce an effect upon Bob. The careless good humor of his countenance suddenly gave place to an extreme solemnity. He contemplated the little girl with startled curiosity.

"John Parmelee!" he repeated at length. "Cash'er of der bank! Say, little girl, was dat der bank up at Tisdale?"

Sophie intimated that it was.

"Say!" exclaimed Bob, emitting a long breath, "Well, dat's a good un! Why, he's der feller what's been in all der papers! I selled more'n fifty papers off er him! An' they said he was 'scaped to Canady."

"I don't know what you mean," said Sophie, quite mystified.

"Why, John Parmelee's der feller what stealed der money out er der safe at Tisdale!" cried Bob, with an explosion of emphasis.

"It is false! my papa never stole any thing!" returned Sophie, with vehement indignation.

"Oh, come off!" said Bob, incredulously. "It's all in der papers, I tells yer! Stealed more'n fifty-seven t'ousand dollars! It was last Wednesday night as der job was done; ain't I

been a-hollerin' it all day? An' deys offered a t'ousand dollars reward for der chaps as runs him in!"

"I don't care what they say!" exclaimed Sophie. "I know he didn't steal it, for I was there when he went away; and he left all the money behind him. He put it in a secret place under the floor of the sitting room, because some one had written him in a letter that robbers were coming to rob the bank; and he thought it would be better there than in the safe. And then he went away, and I came after him to bring him back."

Bob listened to all this with close attention.

"What did he go away fur?" he asked at length.

"I think he didn't know what he was doing," said Sophie, with some feeling of mortification.

"Oh, ah!—tight?" said Bob, with a nod of intelligence.

"It is something he eats," Sophie explained. "He is that way every evening; but that evening he was more so than usual."

"Hello! Why, he's one o' them ere opium

fiends!" exclaimed Bob, vivaciously. "Oh, I know all about dem! I goes down ter der jint myself, oncet in a while; an' I've tried hittin' der pipe, too; but it just made me chuck up victuals, an' I stopped it. But I knows 'em. Do you see dat old gal lyin' there?" he continued, pointing to the sleeping woman in the corner. "She's one on 'em. Crazy Sal, we calls her. But say, where's all dat money, now?"

"I have it with me," Sophie replied; "I've got in my—oh!" she broke off, with an accent of consternation, "what has become of my black satchel?"

"Yer bag, do yer mean? Dat's right! I fetched it along, an' dere it is, under the mattress. But, Great Scissors!" he suddenly exclaimed, sitting erect, as if something had stung him, while his red hair seemed to stand up all over his head, "do yer mean for ter say as how all dat fifty-seven t'ousand dollars is in that bag o' yourn?"

"You musn't tell any body!" said Sophie, with a startled look.

"Oh, doncher worry! I ain't no squealer!

But say, what 'yer goin' to do with it? Gi' me a hundred, will yer? Oh, my! couldn't we have a gay time! We'd buy a kerridge an' drive roun' the park! an' go to the theayter in der private box! an' take our drinks over der Hoffman House bar! Let's have a squint at it!"

"You musn't!" said Sophie, with decision. "You don't understand. The money isn't mine at all; it belongs to the people who put it in the bank. I'm going to give it to my papa to give back to them. If I touched a bit of it I should be a thief!"

"By golly, ain't you jest honest!" sighed Bob, gazing at her with a mixture of curiosity and admiration. "But dat's a stavin' big pile," he continued, pensively. "Ef we was to take out on'y jest a hundred dollars, nobody'd never mind! An' I'd do all der treatin'!"

Sophie shook her head. "We should be robbers; and robbers can never be happy!"

"Dey can't, can't dey!" returned Bob, briskly "I ain't so sure! Dere's Black Hal an' his gang; dey's all gay 'nough, for what I see! An' I'll tell you what," he added, dropping his

voice to a tone of mystery, and bending over toward her; "here's a queer go—I didn't think to speak on it afore! Black Hal's dere feller what laid der pipes to crack der Tisdale Bank. An' Crazy Sal, dere, an' me, we heared 'em talkin' of it; an' she said as how she was goin' ter write to der bank fellers, to warn 'em. So dat must be der letter yer pa got,—do yer catch on?"

"How did you hear what Black Hal was saying about the bank?" Sophie inquired. "And what made that person who is asleep there care whether he robbed the bank or not?"

"Well, it's a big secret 'bout Black Hal," Bob replied, with a chuckle; "but seein' it's you, I guess I'll tell yer. Yer see, dis 'ere house we lives in is right up alongside of another house; dere ain't but der thickness of a wall betwixt 'em, but to get into der other house, yer has to go inter another door, way roun' der corner. Well, Black Hal, he don't know dat; but yer bets yer life I knows it! and what's more, his room's right alongside of ourn, and I've got a hole t'rough the wall! So, if I wants ter hear 'em talk any time, what I does, I pulls out der

plug and puts my ear to der hole, an' dere I be!"

Suiting the deed to the word Bob arose, went to the wall opposite the door and removed a section of the plaster about a foot in diameter, disclosing the bricks beneath. One of these bricks he pulled out, and thereby revealed a crevice, three inches high and half an inch in its greatest width, which penetrated through into the adjoining room.

"But I should think they would see that from the other side," Sophie remarked.

"Dat's all right?" said Bob, replacing the brick. "I'se been aroun' ter look. T'other house don't go so far out as ourn, and der hole comes right in der corner of der room. I can hear all dey says, an' see some too, when dey's got der lamp lit. An' dat's where dey go ter talk deir biggest secrets; dey don't suspect nothin'!" and Bob winked archly.

"And that was how you heard about the robbery?" said Sophie.

"In course it was! An' I telled Sal. An' when she heared 'bout Tisdale, she sorter pricked up her ears, Sal did, an' let on as she'd

write an' stop it. Oh, Sal's a cur'ous critter, an' don't yer forgit it! Guess she must 'a been a lady oncet. She says as how Black Hal's her brother. He comes in here times, when he's flush, an' gives her a quarter for opium. But she ain't like him; she's a good sort, Sal is, if she is crazy! I has her to live with me; an' I don't charge her nothin' for board, neither!"

"Does she stay here all the time?" inquired Sophie.

"No; she sorter loafs 'bout der streets, an' sings songs; an' fellers tips her pennies; she can sing a daisy song, Sal can, when she gits warmed up to it! Den she goes down to der j'int an' hits der pipe, or chews, like yer pa. She's sleepin' solid, now; but times, when she's awake, she'll talk right along, an' don't care if yer listens to her or not."

"What does she talk about?" asked Sophie, glancing at the unconscious woman with interest.

"Oh, 'bout her husban', an' a little gal she had, an' the fun dey useter have together; but I guess dey's dead now; for dey's none of 'em

ever comes here. An' Sal, she'll be dead, too, 'fore long, ef she don't let up on herself. Guess it 'll sorter break me up, when Sal pegs out; I ain't got no pertickler use for her; but I ain't ever had no ma nor pa, and I kinder like to have old Sal aroun'. Have yer had all yer wants to eat?"

"Yes, thank you," said Sophie. "I'm very sorry for the poor lady, and I think it's very good of you to be kind to her."

".Yer' gettin' sleepy, ain't yer?" Bob inquired briskly.

"I believe I am," she admitted. "But if I go to sleep, I shall dream of my papa, and that he is with me; and then, when I wake up, it won't be true. I wish I knew where he was!"

"Jest you go to sleep," said Bob, "an' I'll find out 'bout yer pa termorrer. Ef Black Hal's got him, I knows where ter look; so doncher worry!"

"Black Hal won't come here and find my satchel, will he?" demanded Sophie, her dark eyes opening widely in sudden anxiety.

"Not if I knows it, he won't!" returned Bob, with manly confidence. "I'se pertectin'

yer. I is; an' Black Hal nor nobody else don't git ahead on me! I'll fix yer bag all right; talk about yer secret hidin' places! dere's more on 'em in dis room dan holes in a sieve! Jest you curl up an' take a snooze, little gal, an' dream of yer pa all yer wants to!"

Sophie lay down accordingly; and, thoroughly tired out with fatigue of mind and body, almost immediately fell into a sound sleep.

Bob sat for awhile, feeling of his bare toes in an abstracted manner and occasionally scratching his head. At length he roused himself from his reverie, looked closely at the sleeping girl, and then, inserting his hand beneath the mattress, drew forth the black satchel.

He opened it and saw the nightgown and comb and brush. The latter he knew the use of theoretically, but the nightgown was an enigma to him. He took them out and laid them on one side, and then extracted the brown paper parcel.

It was carefully tied up, but was not sealed. On it was written, in a clear, clerkly hand, the pregnant words: "Fifty-seven thousand, one hundred and forty-nine dollars and fifty cents."

Bob studied every stroke of this writing with deep scrutiny. Not that he found any difficulty in reading it; he comprehended its import perfectly well. He lifted the parcel, and "hefted" it in his hand. He squeezed it between his fingers, and noted its compactness. He got to his feet and walked around the room, with it under his arm.

As he approached the door on his second round, he laid his hand on the handle and opened it. He glanced over his shoulder as he did so; but neither of the sleepers had stirred. He stepped across the threshold, and closed the door behind him,—still, however, keeping his fingers on the latch. After a moment, he opened the door and came back. Nothing in the room had changed.

"It 'ud be as easy as fallin' off a log!" he said, half aloud.

The brown paper parcel seemed alive. He could almost fancy it was drawing him toward the door again. He returned to the mattress, and squatted down beside it, with the parcel on his knees. The writing was uppermost. It read like an invitation—an imperative sum-

mons! He turned the parcel over; but he could see the writing plainer than ever, in his mind.

Bob knew nothing of heaven and hell, except in the way of emphatic statement. He had never formed the conception of an immortal soul, liable to everlasting happiness or misery. So far as his observation went, the only drawback to evil doing was the risk of being found out. He had not seldom yielded to such temptations as came in his way, and no particular harm had resulted from it.

On the other hand he knew a good deal about the value of money. It could give him every thing he wanted, and relieve him from every thing that was irksome. It meant power and pleasure unlimited; and here it was absolutely in his grasp. "Fifty-seven thousand, one hundred and forty-nine dollars and fifty cents!"

All this was clear enough. There was only one thing that Bob could not understand; and that was, that in spite of all the above practical considerations, there was in him something that blindly and perversely opposed itself to

them, and made him feel that he should never be quite comfortable if he accepted the comfort which the contents of that bundle could give him.

"Oh, what darned foolishness!" said Bob, frowning, and tucking the bundle under his arm. "I'll do it, anyway!"

His eyes fell upon Sophie; he bent over, and gazed into her face. The child stirred in her sleep; she turned partly over, smiled, and murmured, "Papa, dearest papa!"

Bob laid down the bundle. A hot flush came into his face, and his breast heaved. A new current of thoughts flooded his mind, and made his eyes smart. At the same time his heart felt lighter than a moment before. He jumped to his feet, caught up the bundle, and disposed it in a place where it would be out of the way, and safe.

"I'se pertectin' her, I is!" he said to himself, as he made his preparations for repose. "I ain't a-goin' back on her,—not me!" This was his interpretation of the experience, and perhaps it was as good as another.

But Bob was not destined to sleep yet. He

had scarcely lain down when he sat up again, listening intently. An ear less acute than his might not have noticed any thing; but an instant's attention informed Bob that somebody had entered the adjoining room of the other house. Ordinarily he might have paid no further heed to the matter; but to-night there was a special motive for investigating it.

He had put out the lamp on lying down, and the room was dark. He arose noiselessly, and stole on tiptoe to the aperture in the wall. Cautiously he removed the loose brick, and applied first his ear and then his eye to the hole.

There were four men in the room, all of whom Bob recognized. Harold Blackmer, alias Black Hal, was one; then there were Dick and Mike, his business partners; and the fourth man was John Parmelee, gagged, and bearing evidence of rough usage.

XVII.

PARMELEE was evidently worn out. As he stood in the center of the room his legs shook from exhaustion and his head drooped forward on his breast. The fatigue of his long tramp and want of sleep and food were enough to account for his condition, but his worst suffering probably came from his enforced abstinence from opium. The promise he had made to Sophie on Wednesday night had been kept ever since involuntarily.

His delirium had passed away; but this fact, perhaps, rather added to the misery of his plight than diminished it.

The room in which he found himself was comfortably furnished; it was used by Blackmer and his gang as a specially secure and inaccessible retreat. Here they were in the habit of coming to discuss their plans or to transact any business requiring exceptional privacy. There was a thick carpet on the

floor to deaden sound, and the walls were hung with dark paper. There were half a dozen stout and comfortable chairs and a broad bottomed sofa that could be used as a bed. A four-legged table and a stove which could be adapted to cooking purposes completed the furniture. There was a cupboard in the corner containing dishes and glasses and some bottles of wine and spirits. The window of the room was protected by a heavy dark curtain, and the door could be barricaded by a couple of iron bars, fitting into sockets. Altogether, it was a much snugger and more presentable apartment than the one on which Bob so prided himself.

Blackmer led Parmelee to a chair, into which the latter immediately sank down. The gag was then removed from his mouth, and a glass of brandy and water was set before him, which he drained eagerly. Meanwhile, Dick and Mike were unpacking and setting on the table the contents of a basket. There were a couple of roast chickens, some fried oysters, and other suitable viands.

"Now, John, my dear fellow," said Blackmer, in a friendly tone, "if you have any appetite—and you look as if you had—fall to and enjoy yourself. Don't be bashful; we'll send in our bill afterward!"

A starving man does not stand upon niceties of ceremony. John Parmelee ate what was before him, while the other three also seated themselves at the table, and swallowed whatever solid or liquid nourishment was to their several tastes. After all had finished, Blackmer took up the word again.

"Well, brother-in-law," he said, lighting a cigar, and throwing one leg carelessly over the other, "I'm glad of the opportunity of a chat with you, after all these years. And let me apologize for the unceremonious manner in which you were brought here. There was no time for explanations, at the moment; and your usually acute intellect seemed to be, temporarily, a little obscured. But we are all right now; and should there be any further trouble, you will be to blame for it, not we."

"What do you want of me? Why did you bring me here?" asked Parmelee.

"Well, hang me if he ain't a cool hand!" muttered Dick, picking his teeth pensively.

"It was an alternative between bringing you here, and allowing the detectives to provide you with quarters in the Tombs," Blackmer replied. "This retreat, if not luxurious, is at least as comfortable as a stone cell and bread and water; and it has this advantage—that you can, on certain conditions, escape from it; whereas the Tombs—well—you can judge for yourself!"

"I don't know what you mean," said Parmelee.

"Don't yez be givin' us none uv yer danged imperance!" growled Mike, threateningly.

"Will you stow that?" said Blackmer to him, in a sharp tone. "Who's bossing this thing, you or I? There's no need to hurry Mr. Parmelee; he'll come round as soon as he has taken in the situation. "Possibly," he added, turning to Parmelee, "you have not had leisure to glance at the morning paper?"

He drew one from his pocket, and handed it to his brother-in-law, who ran his eyes over the double-headed and illustrated columns, with an air of bewilderment. Then he looked up and

met the gaze of the three men fixed upon him.

"I know nothing about this," he said. "This paper is dated Friday. I thought to-day was Thursday. They are wrong; I have stolen no money. The last I remember, I was in my house in Tisdale, waiting for—" He stopped short.

"You're as good as a play, you are!" remarked Dick, sarcastically. "Go on, young man!"

"That is all I have to say," replied Parmelee.

"Of course we believe every thing you say," Blackmer observed, with elaborate courtesy. "But we want to know one thing more; what have you done with the money."

"I have none of it. I presume the directors have it."

"Ah, indeed! In that case, it is odd they should be offering a thousand dollars for the capture of the man who stole it—whose name, by a strange coincidence, happens to be the same as your own! Come, come, my dear John! You are wasting your talents as an actor to no purpose. To encourage you, I'll

set you an example of frankness. Last Wednesday evening, I and my two friends here took a trip out to Tisdale to relieve you of the charge of that money. When we got there, like old Mother Hubbard, the safe was bare and the cashier was gone. Now, it is certain we haven't got the money; the directors behave as if they hadn't got it; so that the painful conviction is forced upon us that—in short—that my respected brother-in-law is, after all, human like the rest of us! Honestly, now, don't you think so yourself?"

While Blackmer had been speaking, in his suave, unrelenting tones, Parmelee had been mechanically staring at the newspaper in front of him; and all at once his eye caught a paragraph about Sophie. He had hitherto supposed that the child had remained at home, and must, sooner or later, have informed the directors as to the whereabouts of the money. But here she also was reported to be missing! What could have become of her?

Again he raised his eyes, and confronted the faces before him. A terrible fear made his heart sick.

"What have you done with my little daughter? Sophie—where is she?" he cried out.

The men glanced at one another, and laughed.

"What have you done with her, I say?" he shouted, jumping to his feet in a frenzy. "By Heaven! if you have harmed a hair of her head, I'll—"

A blow from Mike's herculean fist, delivered straight between the eyes, knocked John Parmelee senseless to the floor. When he came to himself he was seated in the chair, and bound to it hand and foot. Blackmer stood in front of him, with the gag between his fingers.

"Listen to me, John," he said. "We will have no more of this foolery. If you don't put up, we'll shut you up—for good and all! We are willing to go shares with you in the money; we will take the fifty thousand and you can keep the balance. If you don't consent to that, and tell us where to find the stuff—by God! you shall never leave this room alive! I mean what I say! Now, what is your answer?"

There was a silence. The sweat broke out on the prisoner's pallid forehead. He knew the threat was no idle one; there could be no

hope of succor in a place like this. He knew, moreover, or he fancied he did, that, since Sophie was not at home, the money must still be lying in the hole under the sitting-room floor. If he told them this they would set him free sooner or later, and they would restore to him his little daughter, who otherwise might be the victim of such a fate as he shuddered to think of, for that they had captured Sophie he no longer doubted. She must have been there when they came, and they had carried her off as a hostage.

The alternative, therefore, as it presented itself to his mind, was this : If he kept silence, death to himself, and death, or worse, to Sophie ; if he spoke, freedom to both of them, and probably the means of escape from the country. It was a heart-breaking temptation.

But John Parmelee, though weak in some ways, was strong in others.

"I can tell you nothing!" he said, in a faint voice.

Blackmer had a shrewd, if superficial knowledge of human nature. It was impossible for him to believe that Parmelee had not got the

money; or, consequently, that he would not prefer giving it up, to death. Moreover, he wanted the money, and was strongly averse, on politic grounds, to murder. He had not comprehended the part that Sophie played in the matter, but, had he done so, it would only have strengthened his conviction of final success.

"You are a tough customer, John," he said quietly; "but you are reckoning on finding a soft place in us, and you are badly mistaken. I will give you one more chance. We have some business round the corner, and shall be gone half an hour. Think it over in the mean while; and have your mind made up by the time we come back. If you are willing to do what we wish then, well and good. If not, you will never see the light of day again, and no one will ever know what you died of. That's my last word to you!"

With this he replaced the gag in Parmelee's mouth, and the three went out together, locking the door behind them, and leaving their prisoner to his reflections.

XVIII.

BEFORE Sophie was fully awake the next morning, there was mingled with her dreams a song, which she had often heard her father sing. But this time it seemed to be sung in a woman's voice, worn but sweet, and with a quality in it so pathetic that, when the little girl awoke at last, there were tears on her cheeks.

She raised herself on her mattress, and, turning round, saw the elderly woman of the night before, standing in front of the window and looking out, with her long gray hair hanging down her back. She was singing the last verse of the song, which ran thus :—

"Now, our kisses all are over,
But the dreams of past embraces
Haunt my sleep in nights of June,
Till, awaking, dreams forsaking,
I, that was last year her lover,
Question, 'Was it curse or boon?"
Nay—for love is not time's toy;
Who but once hath seen his face, is
Heir of an eternal joy!"

The woman now moved from the window, and showed a face which was pale and wasted, but in which were still visible the traces of remarkable beauty. She had large, dark, heavy-lidded eyes, with long, sweeping brows; a straight, delicate nose, and a mouth profoundly sad. But she had an uncared-for, disheveled look; her attire was poor and dingy; and she met the child's inquiring scrutiny with a dreamy, uncertain glance, which, however, gradually formed itself into an expression of gentle friendliness.

"Good-morning," said Sophie; and then, as the woman did not immediately reply, she asked: "Do you know where Bob is?"

"Bob is selling papers, my dear," replied the woman, in a soft, slow voice. "He goes out much earlier than this. Bob is a good boy."

"He hasn't any mother, has he!" Sophie inquired.

The woman had begun to comb out her long gray hair. She paused at the question, and flung her hair back from her face.

"Bob is as good as a son to me," she replied, at length.

"You have no son of your own?"

"No; but I had a daughter once."

"Is she dead?"

It was some time before the woman answered. At last she said, "No; she is not dead. It is I who am dead. I died years ago!"

The startling assertion was made so quietly that Sophie was not startled. She would probably have been afraid of a ghost if she had seen one; but this woman did not fulfill her idea of a ghost. She recollected that Bob had called her Crazy Sal, and said she ate opium; and she concluded that this was merely such an instance of aberration as she had often noticed in her father.

"My papa has gone away, and I am looking for him," she said. "He went away in the night, when he did not know what he was doing. Did your little girl lose you in the same way I lost him?"

Crazy Sal, who had listened intently to the tones of the child's voice, gazing at her earnestly the while, now asked: "Are you like your father?"

"My papa is a tall man, and I am a little

girl," Sophie answered. "We are not a bit alike."

The woman continued to scrutinize her searchingly for a few moments; then her eyes gradually resumed their wonted dreamy expression, and she shook her head.

"It's only a fancy, like the rest," she muttered to herself, combing her hair. "It isn't real. It won't come true. They have forgotten me. If I went back they wouldn't want me. Christ raised the dead; but He never raised the dead who died as I have done."

Meanwhile, Sophie got up, and, with the neatness and love of order that were characteristic of her, began to pick the bits of straw from her dress and to put the bed in as presentable a condition as the circumstances admitted. The remains of last night's supper were still on the table, and these Sophie re-arranged and christened breakfast. She had by this time acquired a good appetite, and she cheerfully invited Crazy Sal to sit down and partake with her.

Sal, however, had not known what it was to be wholesomely hungry for a good many years;

she contented herself with a piece of biscuit and a few mouthfuls of water. But, as soon she turned away from the table, Sophie noticed her slip something between her lips, which the child shrewdly suspected to be opium.

Be that as it might, the woman's spirits soon showed some improvement ; the lines of her face softened, and her manner became less incoherent and restless. She stood in the window with her hands hanging folded before her, humming to herself, and watching the sunshine creep down the brick wall on the other side of the narrow court-yard. When it reached a certain point it would be ten o'clock, at which hour it was Sal's custom to go forth.

"I will help you find your papa, dear," she said to Sophie. "I will sing in the squares and at the corners of the streets, and you shall stand beside me; and perhaps, among the crowd that stops to listen, you will see your papa."

Sophie was about to explain that Bob had already promised to bring her news of her father, and that it would therefore be best to

await them where she was, when the thought of the black satchel entered her mind, and, along with it, an appalling misgiving. She had seen it placed under her mattress the night before; but she remembered that, when making over the bed this morning, she had not come across it. She ran to the mattress and turned it back. Yes, the black satchel was gone!

The room was so bare and empty of furniture that to search it seemed to require hardly more than a glance. The satchel was nowhere visible. Sophie stood in dismay. Almost as much as its loss did she lament the shadow thereby cast on the reputation of her friend Bob. She had believed in his honesty as she believed in her own. Even now, she would rather credit a miracle than his unfaithfulness.

"Have you seen it?" she exclaimed, addressing Sal impetuously. "It was here last night when I went to sleep! My black satchel!—oh! if it is lost!"

Sal replied with a look of placid and gentle interrogation. Evidently she did not know what Sophie was talking about.

"Did you see Bob go out?" the latter continued, with passionate urgency. "He wouldn't do any thing wrong, would he? Where is he? Oh, I must see him! I must ask him! Where can I find him?" she continued, squeezing one of her little hands with the other, while her voice broke. "I must find my satchel! My papa would not be glad to see me if I had lost what he told me to take care of!"

"Is your father unkind to you?" the woman asked, in a compassionate tone. "If he were like what my husband was, he would not be unkind. Somehow, dear, you make me think of him. Our little baby might have grown to be a child like you."

"He is the kindest and best papa that ever lived!" cried Sophie, breaking into sobs. "I'm afraid something terrible has happened to him! And I have no one but him! Mamma has never come back since I was five years old!"

Crazy Sal, with an impulse of tenderness whose force she herself could not understand, drew the child to her and embraced her, and her gray hair fell forward, and mingled with Sophie's wavy mane of black.

"Let me be a mother to you, for a little while," she said. "We have each lost what was dearest to us. I shall never find mine again; but come with me; for you are a little girl, and God will give your dearest back to you again."

So the mother and daughter—mother and daughter indeed, little as they suspected it—went out together to find what had been provided for them.

XIX.

IT will be remembered that Mr. Fred Tyrrel, on the night of the discovery of the Tisdale Bank robbery, had disagreed with the conclusions of the other directors, and had formed a theory of his own as to the probable truth of the matter. Though he had not hit upon the actual truth, he had at all events discredited Parmelee's guilt.

He was still quite a young man, not more than thirty years of age. His family was of old New England stock, having emigrated from England during the first half of the seventeenth century. His grandfather had been an East India merchant and ship owner, and had amassed a large fortune in trade. His father was a man of statesmanlike instincts, and early took an interest in the affairs of government; after having been elected twice or thrice to the legislature he had finally been made governor of his state. Fred had received, at school and

at college, the best education that America affords her sons, and after graduating he embarked for the Old World and spent two or three years in travel. He had introductions to the best people in London, Paris, Berlin, and Petersburg, and he took advantage of the facilities thus afforded him to become familiar with the forms and workings of the governments of the various countries. On his return home he had applied his knowledge to the examination of the political, economic and social problems of his own native land, and had embodied some of his conclusions in articles in some of the leading reviews and magazines, thereby acquiring considerable reputation as an intelligent and dispassionate reasoner and critic.

At this period, he contemplated an immediate entrance into public life. But a personal experience of the character and methods of some of the political leaders and their hangers-on, had the effect of so disenchanting his ambition as to make him relinquish, for the present, an idea of putting his theories into execution; and when the position of director of the local bank was proffered him, he accepted it, partly

from a desire to identify himself with the interests of the town in which he lived, and partly in order to gain a practical working knowledge of the inner routine and management of such institutions. This connection had led to his forming the acquaintance of John Parmelee, the cashier.

At the time of the latter's marriage, Tyrrel was a boy at school, and he was in college when the calamity occurred which culminated in the disappearance of Mrs. Parmelee. He had, however, seen her and had been impressed by her remarkable beauty, and when he returned from his travels, he formed a strong and sympathetic friendship with the husband, and conceived a particular affection for little Sophie. The reserve and oddity of the child, which repelled or perplexed others, was for him a charm and a recommendation; he fancied he could discover in her nature the germs of a lovely and rich womanhood. Sophie, for her part, loved and trusted him from the first; he was, in her imagination, an incarnation of all that was strong, wise, and kindly.

During the past two years or more, Tyrrel

had been a frequent visitor at Parmelee's house. Without making his generosity so obtrusive as to risk wounding the cashier's pride, he had nevertheless contrived to assist and encourage him in many ways. But sympathy has keen eyes, and Tyrrel had latterly begun to entertain something more than a suspicion that his unfortunate friend was walking in the same path that his wife had traveled before him. A feeling of delicacy prevented him from attempting to solve the doubt by direct interrogation, or even from making a secret investigation into a matter which Parmelee wished to conceal; but the situation caused him anxiety—more on the cashier's account than on that of the bank—and he often took counsel with himself as to what was best to be done. Parmelee, like all opium-eaters, however tractable and reasonable on other subjects, would probably fail to respond satisfactorily to any remonstrances, however kindly or firmly delivered; so he finally contented himself with resolving to step in, whenever the crisis should arrive and protect his friend from the worst results of his vice. His solicitude for Sophie was perhaps more ten-

der than for her father. Sophie, at all events, should never, if he could prevent it, suffer from the consequences of the unhappy weakness of her parents.

On the night of the cashier's mysterious disappearance, Tyrrel, while looking about the room, had found on the sofa the small metal box in which the unfortunate man kept his supply of opium. Parmelee had always taken especial pains to keep this box where no one could find it; but the excess of his delirium had prevented him, on this last occasion, from concealing it in its usual place. Its discovery had convinced Tyrrel of the correctness of his surmises. On the part of an opium-eater, any insane extravagance or escapade is possible; and it was easy to conceive that John might have wandered away in an unconscious or irresponsible state of mind. It was not so clear, however, why Sophie had accompanied him; still less could Tyrrel understand how the safe could have been attacked on that particular night of all others. It was not to be supposed that the thieves, whoever they were, could have been able to foretell the exact moment when the

cashier's mind would give way, and leave him impotent to protect his trust; and, on the other hand, the idea of any collusion between him and them was inadmissible. It was possible perhaps, that John might have been kidnapped, as a means of covering the burglar's traces; but that Sophie also should have been spirited away, without leaving any traces, was scarcely credible.

Turn the matter which way he would, it remained more or less a puzzle to Tyrrel. But, whatever the solution might prove to be, he stood firm in his conviction that it would establish Parmelee's innocence of all criminal action or intent.

His aim therefore, was, first to trace him and vindicate him from the charge, and secondly—either through his means, or independently—to bring home the crime to the really guilty parties. And herein he had the other directors at a disadvantage. For while they would naturally proceed on the supposition that Parmelee, as a criminal, would either seek to put himself beyond the jurisdiction of the United States, or, if still in this country, would be

found in the meeting-places of other malefactors, Tyrrel, in accordance with his theory of the man's delirium, wasted no time in such wild-goose chases, but prosecuted his search in places otherwise the most improbable.

He engaged the services of several detectives, and, after explaining to them his views of the matter, dispatched them in various directions. The adjacent country, within a radius of fifty miles, was carefully gone over; and particular inquiries were made for a little girl with black hair and eyes; for Tyrrel had reflected that she was more likely than her father to attract the notice of uninterested people.

The whole of Thursday was consumed in this way, but without any satisfactory result. No one had seen such a child as was described. On the other hand, several more had been noticed, who answered more or less closely to the description of John Parmelee; but when those clews were followed up, none of them proved to be correct. Tyrrel's first effort had been a failure.

Hitherto, he had not believed that Parmelee would be likely to go to New York; he would

rather wander vaguely about, and probably not get far away from his starting point. It now became necessary, however, to continue the search in the city. One of the detectives took the midnight train down on Thursday, and, in the course of a chance conversation with the conductor, elicited the fact that a dark-haired and dark-eyed girl, apparently about fourteen years of age, and carrying in her hand a large black satchel, had traveled to New York, alone, on the same train the night before. The conductor added that she seemed to be in an anxious frame of mind, and that she had not provided herself with a ticket.

The detective wired back this news to Tyrrel, from the next station; but Tyrrel did not receive it until the next (Friday) morning, at breakfast. It surprised, perplexed, and did not altogether please him. To tell the truth, it tended to place Parmelee in a somewhat unfavorable light. It now looked as if he must have directed Sophie's flight, and either have been with her on the train, though perhaps in another car, or else have arranged to meet her in New York at some designated rendezvous.

The black satchel was another source of disquietitude to Tyrrel. What could it have contained?

He took the next train to New York, feeling seriously worried. At the Grand Central depot he was met by his detective, who had in the meanwhile obtained further news. He had traced Sophie to her lodging at the house of the friendly railway porter; he had conversed with the latter's wife, and had gathered from her that the child seemed to be in search of her father. Less than an hour before the detective's arrival, Sophie had left her entertainer for the second time, satchel and all, and from this point all trace of her had been lost.

The inference from this news seemed to be that Parmelee had not been privy to his daughter's journey, and Tyrrel's misgivings were in so far relieved; for, even had the cashier been wicked enough to steal from the bank, he would not have deliberately abandoned Sophie in New York. According to present appearances, the indications again pointed to the theory of Parmelee's insanity as the correct one.

The remaining difficulties were, however, as far as ever from being overcome. To begin

with, although Sophie was unquestionably in New York, it by no means seemed to follow that her father was there. The child might, or she might not, have had reason to believe that he had gone thither; and it was evident, at any rate, that she did not know his address. The task of finding a person in a great city like New York is enough to try the abilities even of a trained investigator; but for a little girl like Sophie, who had never before been outside of her native village, the odds against success were incalculable. And, meanwhile, she was in constant danger.

Tyrrel once more called all his detectives together, and set them to work afresh. Of the men employed by the other directors, two were at this time in Montreal, two in Boston, two following supposed clews westward and southward; and one was in New York. Up to Friday evening, however, no member of either party had discovered any thing worth reporting, beyond what has been above worded. The political turmoil made every thing exceptionally difficult.

Late on Friday night, Tyrrel himself chanced upon some information that seemed valuable.

XX.

WHILE lunching at Delmonico's, near Wall street, he had encountered a friend, who invited him to a late dinner at his house that evening; remarking that there would be several persons there whom Tyrrel might like to meet. Tyrrel accepted conditionally upon the pressure of other affairs; and in the evening, as there were no fresh developments from his detectives, he left word at his hotel where he might be found and took the Elevated railroad up town.

On entering the room where his host, with the other guests was awaiting him, Tyrrel saw a face which he thought he recognized; and this impression was confirmed when the gentleman to whom the face belonged came forward, and recalled himself to his recollection. "Don't you remember Frank Sherman?" he said. "You and I were in college together, twelve years ago."

"Certainly I do!" returned Tyrrel, shaking hands with him cordially; "and where have you been since?"

At the dinner-table they were assigned places beside each other, and were very well entertained in giving each other an account of their experiences since their last meeting, and in recalling the adventures and episodes of their college life. But Sherman, who was full of Mexico, could not help constantly bringing it into his discourse. Finally Tyrrel said with a laugh: "You must be related by some ancestral connection with the Aztecs or the Montezumas."

"I feel more like a discoverer than a native," Sherman answered, "and I am hospitably anxious to make all the good fellows partakers of my good fortune. By the way, I succeeded in capturing one only yesterday, and I have mortgaged him soul ,and body to the cause. He is going back with me next Monday. He is the sort of man that is wanted down there, and I expect great things of him."

"What sort of a man is he?" Tyrrel inquired. "The type of Walker of Nicaragua?"

"Well, Walker, before his first opportunity came, may not have been so promising a personage as my new recruit. When I was living here a few years ago, I used to see a good deal of him. He was a polished, clever, self-contained fellow, without any apparent purpose or interest in life; one felt he was throwing himself away; he was doing no good, to himself or any body else; and might be doing some harm. There are too many such men in New York, with money but with no occupation; they are out of place, and they know it; and the more they know it, the further astray they go. But give them a new country to develop, and they would surprise you! I speak as one having authority, for I used to belong to the gang myself. Well, I ran across this fellow yesterday, and put the case to him in such a way, that he has agreed to stand by me, and be my right hand man."

"Is it any one I know?" asked Tyrrel. "What is his name?—if the question is discreet."

"By the way, I wouldn't be surprised if you did know him," exclaimed Sherman. "I have

an impression that he used to live up your way at one time. His name is Harold Blackmer."

"Harold Blackmer!" Tyrrel repeated the name with a sense of disagreeable surprise, some reflection of which found its way into his voice. Sherman noticed it.

"You do know him, then?" he said. "Isn't he a friend of yours? Have you got any thing against him? Of course, I never took him for a saint; and saints arn't just what we need in Mexico."

"I have had very little personal knowledge of him," Tyrrel replied, rather reluctantly. In fact, he was a good deal perplexed what to say. He had heard enough about Harold to lead him to believe that he was a thoroughly dangerous character; and it occurred to him that he was perhaps bound in conscience to tell Sherman—who was manifestly ignorant on the subject—what he knew. But he hesitated for a paradoxical reason, characteristic of conscientious persons. The truth was, he had begun to suspect, upon grounds partly explicit and partly inferential, that Blackmer might be concerned more or less directly in the Tisdale Bank

robbery. But, as this suspicion had not yet been verified, he did not feel justified in alluding to it; while at the same time he felt himself to be so much influenced by it in his judgment of Blackmer, as to cause him to fear lest any opinion he might pass upon him would be prejudicial. Thus he was unwilling to speak; and yet he felt that he would be unfaithful to the cause of honest dealing if he allowed Sherman to be hoodwinked by a rascal.

"Does his position with you involve any large responsibilities? he inquired. "Do you allow him the control of any considerable pecuniary interests, for example?"

"Come!" said Sherman, good humoredly, "I know you're keeping something back. Never mind; it won't destroy my faith in human nature! What is it?"

"Well," returned Tyrrel, reddening a little, "I will say this: If I were you, I would make his acquaintance thoroughly before I trusted him too much. He has not led a very reputable life these last few years. It is quite possible that he intends to turn over a new leaf, and certainly I don't want to stand in the way of it. But

experience only can prove how that will be, and of course I shouldn't like to have all the experience on your side, and all the . . . advantage on his!"

Sherman thanked him, and promised to be on his guard; and then the subject was dropped.

Meanwhile, the conversation among the guests turned chiefly on the coming election; various guesses as to the probable issue were made, and one after another gave the grounds for his opinion, or told stories bearing on the campaign. By and by, the great meeting of that evening in Union Square was referred to; and then Sherman contributed an anecdote of his own:

"I was at that meeting myself," he said; "in fact, I came almost directly, from there, here. It was a pretty lively affair, I can tell you; and one incident particularly so. As I was on the platform, where the thing occurred, I can probably give as accurate an account of it as you will be likely to find in the papers to-morrow morning. A number of gentlemen—distinguished I presume—had been making speeches, and every thing was going on comfortably, when

all at once there was some sort of a row down in the crowd, and a lot of them seemed to be making a rush for the platform. At first I thought we were in for a scrimmage, and was debating which way I should jump; but it turned out that they had got hold of a man, and wanted to put him up among us to deliver a harangue. The first thing we knew, he was among us; and a queer looking customer he was! He had no hat, and his garments were as if he had come through a thick set hedge, with a ditch on the other side of it. He had gray hair, and big dark eyes, with a singular stare in them, as if he were looking at a ghost, and saw nothing else. I thought he was probably an anarchist, and had had too much beer; but he was not under the influence of liquor, though he was certainly wrong in the head from some cause; it may have been opium, or it may have been mere insanity."

At the mention of opium, Fred Tyrrel pricked up his ears, and seemed to take an extraordinary interest in the story.

"Well, he started to make his speech," Sherman went on, "and a very odd speech it was.

At first, no one could tell what he was driving at; he talked on in a rambling way, apparently confining himself to glittering generalities; and the crowd applauded as if he had been Daniel Webster himself. But after a while, it turned out that he was enlarging upon his own domestic affairs, which seemed to be in a very badly mixed condition; and he wound up with an attempt to sing a song, about June and noon, mine and thine, lovers and kisses, until the crowd yelled so loud and assumed such a threatening aspect, that the platform gentlemen took the alarm, and kicked the poor orator down the steps. I was really very sorry for the man, and would have helped him if I could; but there was nothing to be done; and before I could offer any remonstrance, he had disappeared in the crowd."

"Did you find out what his name was?" Tyrrel demanded, with restrained eagerness.

"Nobody knew it or had ever seen him before," Sherman replied. "The prevailing idea was that he had escaped from Ward's Island, or that his reason had been dethroned by the excitement of the election."

But Tyrrel entertained a different opinion. The song which Sherman had mentioned was one which he himself had heard John Parmelee sing; and the description of the unknown man's appearance and demeanor had tallied closely enough with those of the lost cashier. The longer he reflected upon it the more convinced did he become that his surmise was correct; and at length he felt constrained to excuse himself to his host, on the plea of business, and to take his leave. Sherman, in bidding him good-night, promised to let him know if any thing untoward occurred with reference to Harold Blackmer.

Tyrrel hastened down to his hotel—the Astor House—summoned his detectives, and communicated to them the clue which he believed himself to have found. They were by this time somewhat wearied of the undertaking, and did not exhibit any marked enthusiasm at the new turn of affairs. The identification was inconclusive, to say the best of it; it might have been any one of a thousand men as well as John Parmelee. But Tyrrel was sanguine and peremptory, and would listen to no dis-

couragement. He was convinced that they were close upon the goal of their endeavors. He dispatched his men accordingly, and then retired to his room for some rest, having told the night clerk that any messenger asking for him was to be taken up stairs at once. But the night passed away, and his sleep was not disturbed. He arose early on Saturday morning, and rang for his breakfast and a newspaper. He turned to the account of the Union Square meeting, but it contained nothing that would assist him in identifying the unknown intruder as John Parmelee. He ate his breakfast, smoked a cigar, and finally, tired of waiting, put on his hat and went down stairs. It was half-past ten when he emerged upon the sidewalk and turned northward for a stroll.

He had not gone a score of yards when he saw an elderly woman and a little girl, who had been walking in front of him, start to cross Broadway in the direction of the City Hall. Just then an express wagon, driven at headlong speed, bore down upon them. The little girl sprang forward to escape it; but her companion, who held her by the arm, drew back at

the same moment: so there they hung in the direct path of sudden death.

But Tyrrel had attended the gymnasium when he was at college, and he was still an athletic man, as well as a courageous one. In an instant he had thrown himself before the advancing wagon and caught the horse by the bridle. The impetus of the latter carried Tyrrel off his feet; but he kept his grasp upon the reins, and avoided the animal's hoofs; and after being dragged a couple of paces, the vehicle was stopped. It was a close shave, but it was enough. Tyrrel informed the driver of the wagon that he should hear from him later, and then turned to the woman and child, and led them back to the sidewalk in safety. The crowd which had begun to collect, finding that nobody was killed, or even hurt, dispersed about its business.

It was not until then that Tyrrel looked at the faces of the persons whom he had rescued; and great was his astonishment to find the black eyes of little Sophie Parmelee gazing solemnly up into his own. He caught her up in his arms and kissed her. Then he scrutinized

the woman—at first with no friendly glance, for he suspected both her character and her intentions.

But after a moment his expression changed; neither the gray hair, nor the wasted features, nor the shabby dress, nor the years that had elapsed since he saw her last, sufficed to disguise from him the truth that this was Sophie's mother. She did not recognize him; but that, perhaps, would come in time. He spoke to her quietly and respectfully; and when he invited her to return with him to the hotel she complied without hesitation.

XXI.

WHEN Blackmer and his companions, late on Friday night, left John Parmelee, bound and gagged to think over the proposition they had made to him regarding the money taken from the safe, and to choose between acceding to that and death—the cashier was perhaps warranted in believing that the darkest hour of his life had come.

He had no exact knowledge where he was. After leaving Union Square, he had been hurried into a cab, which had been driven rapidly down Fourteenth street for a couple of blocks, and then turned to the left. He was, at that time, still partially dazed by the effects of his fall from the platform; and the last traces of the opium influence yet lingered in his brain.

He could perceive, however, that they were passing through some of the poorest regions of the city, between lower Broadway and the North River. Several turns were made, and at last

the cab stopped before a mean-looking house in a dark and narrow street.

It was such a locality as the police seldom visit; on the ground, probably, that the dregs of the population must live somewhere, and that they had better be as little disturbed as possible in their chosen haunts. Nothing short of a great fire could cleanse these Augean Stables of New York, and even that would not exterminate crime.

Parmelee, at all events, entertained no hopes of a rescue; still less was he able to help himself. Mike, who had bound him, had been a sailor the better part of his life, and nothing could be more compact and ship-shape than the manner in which he had done the job.

So far as he himself was concerned, the cashier could perhaps have confronted death with reasonable equanimity. Existence, of late, had not been a pleasure to him. His health was undermined, and he was full of anxieties both for the present and the future. To be at once and forever released from it all would not have been unwelcome.

It was when he thought of his little daughter

that his courage gave way. How could he endure to leave her to the ruin and misery and shame of the world? She was too young to make any stand for herself; she was old enough to be ruined. His wife, too, whom he had hoped at last to save—who would save her now?

There he sat, cramped, stifled and helpless, waiting for the end. Every instant, amidst the ceaseless procession of thoughts, fears and fantasies that swept though his tortured brain, he listened with preternatural acuteness for the sound of the returning footsteps of the men in whose hands his fate was placed; and for the moment when he should be finally brought face to face with the terrible alternative.

Then, too, he had to endure the agony of that remorse which comes too late, for the degradation of mind and body into which he had allowed himself to sink. It was opium that brought him here; it was through opium that Sophie was left defenseless among enemies; and it was opium which would, perhaps, in the supreme crisis of temptation, rob him of moral integrity to take the nobler

course and sacrifice what was dear to what was honorable.

It was an old and well-worn lesson that he was learning, but one which no one, perhaps, has ever learnt vicariously—the beautiful, fatal lesson of human brotherhood, that the effect of no evil, as well as of no good, can be restricted to the good or evil-doer.

If only this cup might pass from him, he thought, he would thenceforward lead a better and cleaner life. But the curse with which he had dallied so long had fastened its grip upon him, and there was nothing to hope and every thing to fear.

Hark! What noise was that?

A quiver passed through John Parmelee's body, and he clenched his teeth and his hands. The time was come! An hour hence—where would he be?

The blood, which had rushed to Parmelee's brain at the first shock, receded and settled heavily about his heart. The coolness of despair was taking the place of the fever of suspense. He could not suffer much more, or much longer. Why did they not come? Hark! again.

It was the same noise as before; but the prisoner now noticed that it did not seem to come from the direction of the staircase, nor was it such a noise as is made by opening doors or ascending footsteps. It was a faint rattling or dragging sound, and it proceeded from outside the house, on the side of the window.

What were they going to do? Were they preparing some trap for him?—some species of torture? The noise continued, and something came in contact with the window-pane. It sounded like a rope, dangling and swinging downward from above. Were they going to hang him out of the window, and let it be inferred that he had committed suicide?

Parmelee was secured with his back to the window, and could not turn his head far enough to see behind him; moreover, the window was concealed by a heavy curtain. He could only conjecture, therefore, what was going on. It did not occur to him that the sounds might originate from some source other than the Blackmer gang. His anticipations were so strongly warped toward disaster that he could not adjust himself to any other issue.

Something scraped and thumped against the wall outside. There was a scramble upon the window-sill, and, after a moment, a crash of breaking glass. The window-bolt was turned back, and the sash thrown up. Next came the impact of two bare feet on the floor of the room.

At this point, Parmelee's self-control gave way, and he uttered a scream. The imagination of evil is always more trying than the worst reality. Perhaps, however, it was the dawning of a hope that this mysterious visitation boded him good, and not evil, that overcame the man's stoicism. Such a revulsion might have upset a stronger nature than his.

Meanwhile, the mystery, after the fashion of most mysteries, promptly resolved itself into something extremely concrete and matter-of-fact—a homely little urchin, with red hair and a freckled visage, and scantily attired in very dilapidated clothes. But no cherub from the Seventh Heaven, clad in rainbows and crowned with sunbeams, could have seemed more lovely and welcome to John Parmelee at that juncture.

"Tell yer what, boss," remarked this visitant,

deftly removing the gag from the prisoner's mouth, and cutting the ropes that bound him with a knife which he took from the table, "dat's der toughest job I'se had in a long while! One time I t'ought I was gone, sure! An' der old rope ain't long 'nough by twenty feet. But if yer hangs down off o' the end and drops, yer won't have fur ter fall; an' it's better nor nothin', anyhow!"

Parmelee arose, stiff and aching as to his body, but with a joyful energy and thankfulness of the heart that went far toward compensating for physical weakness.

His first act was to fling his arms round the boy, and incontinently embrace him.

"How did you know I was here?" he demanded in a trembling voice.

"Oh, I heared and seed der hull thing t'rough der hole in the wall," the other replied, extricating himself with some embarrassment. "I'se got lots ter tell yer, but dis ain't no time fer jawin'. Dem fellers 'll be back here in half a shake, and den yer wuss off nor ever! Out er der winder, boss! an' mind not let go der rope till yer comes to der end of it!"

John was in no mood to procrastinate. He staggered to the window. A rope hung down in front of it. The building was but two stories in height, and the rope was attached to a chimney above. It was the same rope which, in its coiled up state, had served the purpose of a chair in Bob's apartment.

Parmelee sat on the window sill, with his legs outside, and grasped the rope in both hands. Below was an abyss of darkness; but Parmelee would have committed himself to it, had it been as deep as the Bottomless Pit itself. Without hesitation, he swung himself off, and descended, hand under hand.

The rope, however, was too small to be easily grasped; and Parmelee's muscles were much weakened by recent exhaustion. He found his grip relaxing more and more, and the last few feet of the rope slid through his fingers, scorching them like fire. But at the very end was a knot, to which he clung, suspended, for the space of a breath or two, over nothingness.

As luck would have it, Bob selected this moment for making his own descent. He braced the rope behind one knee and over the ankle,

and came sailing down in true acrobatic style. The result was that he landed with considerable force on Parmelee's shoulders. The rope broke, and they both came to the ground in a heap.

XXII.

THE drop from the end of the rope to the ground was not more than five feet, however; and when Bob and John Parmelee had disentangled themselves from each other and got on their feet, they found that no bones were broken. But Bob was near choking with a large fragment of roast chicken which he had looted from the table and crammed into his mouth as he made his exit.

When he had reduced this obstruction he picked up the rope and began to coil it round his body.

"It's a lucky thing she broke, a'ter all," he remarked, philosophically. "If dem fellers had seed a rope hangin' down, dey might a' guessed I'd hed somethin' ter do with it. Now, dat's all right, an' I got der most part o' my rope, too! Come along, boss! we'se as well be gettin' out er dis 'fore dey turns up."

Parmelee glanced about him. They were in

a narrow court connected with the house. On the other side of it rose the blind wall of the opposite building. The street on which the house stood was separated from the court by a door, which stood ajar, and had partly fallen from its hinges. Bob, having bestowed his rope safely, led the way toward this door.

But just as he was about to set foot on the sidewalk outside, he jumped violently back, coming in contact with Parmelee, and almost upsetting him.

"What's the matter?" the latter asked.

The boy turned, and made a vehement gesture of silence. They shrank back into the triangular space between the half-open door and the wall.

Footsteps and voices were approaching up the street. To John Parmelee's ears those voices, though he had never heard two of them until that evening, had a terrible familiarity. Peeping through the aperture made by the loosened hinge of the door, he saw them pass—first Mike, then Dick, and then Blackmer. The latter had a cigar in his mouth, and just as he

got opposite the door he stopped and felt in his pocket for a match.

"Hold up a minute, lads," he said, "till I get a light."

They halted and turned back. There was a slight breeze drawing up the street, and Blackmer, in order to escape it, stepped inside the doorway. He struck his match on the door, within three inches of Parmelee's face on the other side. Through a crack in one of the planks of the door, John saw his face, as the match blazed up.

"Will that damned beggar upstairs squeal, d' yer think?" said Dick's voice.

"Make yer moind aisy on that!" returned Mike; "he's not got the pluck of a shrimp!"

"Leave me to manage him, lads," said Blackmer, throwing away the match with a laugh. "We'll get the money from him first, and the heart out of his body afterward. I've waited a dozen years to be even with him, and he won't slip through my fingers now!"

They walked on together, and in a moment turned into the house, one after the other, and were gone.

Parmelee drew a long breath between his teeth. Bob put his head out of the doorway. The coast was clear.

"Now, then, boss!" he whispered. "Leg it, if yer never did afore! They'll know yer hooked it in two minutes; an' if we ain't five blocks off by dat time, der game's bust, an' don't yer forgit it! Streak it, I tells yer!"

Parmelee needed no urging. He followed the small, ragged figure as it flew along the street and dodged round the corner, until he felt as if his throat were full of glue, his body stuffed with a feather bolster, and his legs paralyzed.

Just then Bob stopped. They were at the foot of the steps of the elevated railway in Park Place. Nobody was in sight. The light of dawn was beginning to contend with that of the stars in the East. They sat down on the steps.

"Say, you's John Parmelee, ain't yer?" demanded Bob, after a while.

John was far too busy catching his breath to reply in words. He nodded.

"In course yer is," said Bob. "Got a little gal, ain't yer?"

John gave a great start, and looked at him. "What—about her?" he gasped out.

"Oh, she's all right, she is!" returned Bob, comfortably. "An' she's got all der boodle out er der bank, in a black bag. I seed it myself!"

John listened in astonishment. "Is she—safe? Where—where—" he panted. "Show me—let me go to her!"

"Easy, boss!" said the urchin, as the other attempted to get to his feet. "Jest you keep yer shirt on! I'se runnin' dis 'ere game, I is! Ef yer don't do as I tells yer dem fellers 'll git their claws on yer agin, an' den yer gone up! 'Sides, I'se got somethin' pertickler to ask yer."

"To ask me?"

"In course! Is dat feller Black Hal—Blackmer's his right name—does he belong ter your folks?"

"He's my brother-in-law," answered Parmelee.

"Dat means he's your wife's brother, don't it?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"Why, dat beats all! I knows her, like she was my own ma! Sal's her name, ain't it?

Dat's her! Crazy Sal, we calls her. Eats opium, she does, an' hits der pipe. Oh, we's prime friends, she an' me, I can tell you! She sleeps over to my place; an' she an' your little gal is sleepin' dere now, right as we sits jawin' on dese ere steps!"

"But where is your place? Where are they? For heaven's sake, my boy, don't make game of me! I—I can't bear it!" faltered John, shaking all over with emotion and excitement. "I've been searching for—my—wife—for ten years."

"Well, yer needn't search no more," rejoined Bob, cheerfully. "Yer'll have her to-night, sure! But yer can't go arter her now, 'cos she's in my house: an' dat's next door to der place we just come out of!"

At this news, Parmelee forced himself erect at once.

"My wife and daughter next door to that thieves' den?" he exclaimed. "Show me the way back. My God! they might be murdered before—"

"Why, what ails yer, boss?" cried Bob, reprovingly. "Don't you go to be a darned

fool! I ain't a-goin' to show yer der way back, an I bet yer don't find it alone! An' if yer did, yer'd on'y get 'em inter trouble, an' do no good! Black Hal an' his gang don' know nothin' 'bout where they is,"—in this, it is to be feared, Bob stretched the truth a little—"an' dere ain't nobody goin' to tell 'em. But jist you wait till dey comes out, an' den yer can catch on to 'em."

"How do I know where they will go? What chance is there of my finding them in the midst of a million people?"

"Well, ain't I a-goin' ter tell yer? If yer knows der ropes, all der people in der worl' ain't goin' ter hinder yer. It's dis way: Crazy Sal (dat's yer wife) she allus goes to the same place for der opium stuff, an' she goes along to'ards der evenin'. Terday, in course, she'll take der little gal along with her. Well, yer goes down dere 'bout der same time, an' yer drops right in on 'em, don't yer?"

"My wife goes every day to an opium joint?" said Parmelee, with a groan.

"Ter be sure she does!" returned Bob, in an encouraging tone; "an' I can take yer right

ter the place. But yer'll have ter keep dark till evenin', less yer wants der cops or Black Hal ter git hold on yer. I'll take yer roun' to a crib I knows on, where yer can lay low; and when my business hours is over, we'll go a'ter Crazy Sal."

"Curse the infernal stuff!" muttered Parmelee, as he followed Bob across the City Hall Park toward the regions of Chatham street. "I'd give my life to destroy the last atom of it off the face of the earth! And I'd almost give my life to have an atom of it in my mouth now! But I'll die before I touch it again!" was his final resolve, uttered with all due purpose and solemnity.

On the East River shore there was, at this time, an antique monument of decay and inefficiency in the shape of a pier, which had never received the medical aid of the doctors of the dock department. In a cavity underneath this structure John Parmelee spent the day, his loneliness being mitigated by the incursion of an occasional wharf rat, and by the presence of one or two loafers as dilapidated as himself. It was not a luxurious retreat; but

perhaps it was as good a place as another in which to review a crippled life, and to make wholesome and honorable resolves for the future.

XXIII.

WHEN Blackmer and his companions entered their prisoner's room and found it empty, they could scarcely credit the evidence of their own senses.

There was the vacant chair and the rope which had bound him, cut in half a dozen pieces. And there was the open window through which he had escaped. But how had it been managed? Had he done it himself, or had he received assistance?

Blackmer was of the former opinion. But Mike, who had done the binding, and had confidence in his workmanship, entertained the the opposite conviction.

As for Dick, he immediately reverted to his old idea that Crazy Sal had had something to do with it, and that Bob had perhaps acted as her agent. The others laughed at the notion; but Dick persisted, and would not be satisfied

with any thing short of a visit to the room in which Bob and Sal lived.

The party repaired thither accordingly, and softly opened the door. There were Sal and Sophie sound asleep on their respective mattresses. But all the visitors mistook Sophie for Bob, and therefore concluded that nothing could be wrong there. Even Dick, if not satisfied, was at least silenced.

They returned to their own room and held a consultation.

"I'll tell you what I think, lads," said Blackmer, at last. "Somebody has been on our trail—either the cops or somebody else. They recognized Parmelee, and laid to get him away from us and secure the reward. They saw us come out and improved the opportunity—fetched a ladder, broke in the window, and carried him off. By this time he's probably safe in the lock-up; and we've got left!"

"We hadn't never ought ter have let go of him," moaned Dick, gloomily. "What did we want to go off an' leave him fur? It makes me sick! I'm goin' out of this business! To have fifty-seven thousand dollars dangled under

yer nose and then jerked away agin, is worse nor starvin' to death!"

"I'm not going to give it up yet," said Blackmer. "Even if he has been run in, it doesn't follow that he has told where the money is. And there's always the off chance that he got away by himself. Anyhow, it'll be in the papers to-day if he has been captured. Suppose we three ramble about to-day, separately, and keep a sharp lookout. Meet here again at eight o'clock to-night and report progress. We may collar the stuff after all. Never say die till after the funeral, is my motto!"

The others had nothing better to suggest, and Blackmer's proposal was agreed to.

But Blackmer had a scheme of his own, for which the one he had announced was merely a blind. He had never really departed from his first view, that Parmelee had escaped unassisted. He had meditated, likewise, upon the singular condition Parmelee had been in at the time of his capture; he had noted his appearance and the nervous distraction of his manner; and had finally arrived at the conviction that he, as well as Sallie, was an opium eater.

From this he reasoned that, since all opium eaters are slaves of their habit, Parmelee's first impulse, on finding himself at liberty, would be to seek out an opium joint and compensate himself for his recent abstinence. New York, at this time, contained only a limited number of these, to which strangers could have access; and they were all situated within a short distance of one another. In one or another of them, therefore, Parmelee might confidently be looked for.

But Blackmer had an additional motive in wishing to act independently of Mike and Dick; he wished to leave the coast clear for his departure to Mexico with Sherman. If he delayed to divide the money with his two companions, he would probably not be ready to set off on Monday morning. The time was short enough, even if all went as he hoped. There must be no hindrance to his movements. If he could find Parmelee between now and Sunday night, however, he might transact his little affair with him, and, leaving Dick and Mike in the lurch, escape with the whole booty in his own pocket.

And what course should he take in case his search were unsuccessful within the required limits of time? Then he must choose between Sherman's offer, and the chance of finding Parmelee at some later period. Fifty thousand dollars was a large sum to let slip between one's fingers; but it was an uncertainty, whereas Sherman's two hundred dollars a week was a fixed fact, not to speak of the other advantages connected with it. Blackmer hesitated for some time; but he finally came to the conclusion that, if he were not successful by the end of the next twenty-four hours, he had better give up the fifty thousand, and keep his engagement with Sherman. This determination stimulated him to leave nothing untried to achieve success in both directions. He would have liked to call on Sherman, and discuss any final points that might come up with reference to their journey; but to do this might detain him too long, and every moment was precious. He thought of sending Sherman a note, telling him that he was kept away by a pressure of final arrangements; but he was reluctant, in the present hazardous state of affairs, to com-

mit himself to writing on any subject; and he persuaded himself that it would not be necessary.

Had he met Sherman at this juncture, it is probable that the latter would have given him a surprise. Sherman had not forgotten Tyrrel's warning; and the more he reflected upon it, the more important did it appear. Tyrrel was not a man prone to make careless statements; and, on this occasion, he had evidently said as little as he could. If Blackmer had been merely wild and dissipated, it was no great matter; Sherman could plead guilty to as much as that himself. But if he had been actually dishonest, it altered the case completely. It was true, no doubt, as Tyrrel had suggested, that a criminal may reform, and henceforth lead an honest life; but the interests which Sherman had at stake were too large to run any risks with them; and the position in which he had designed to place Blackmer would subject him to temptations, which only a man of staunch integrity could resist.

Revolving these things, he entered the barber's saloon to get his beard trimmed; and

while awaiting his turn, he saw the district attorney come into the room. They had been acquainted before Sherman left New York; and he now accosted him, and they sat down together. It occurred to Sherman that this gentleman might be able to solve his doubts; and after a little preliminary conversation, he asked him whether he happened to know any thing of a man by the name of Harold Blackmer?

"Why, let's see!" returned the other, pressing one side of his mustache between his teeth with his finger. "Blackmer—Harold Blackmer? Isn't he the man they call Black Hal?"

"Perhaps so," said Sherman, with an uneasy sensation. "He's a dark-complexioned man."

"Black hair and eyes," continued the attorney; "rather tall, good-looking, dresses well; yes, I guess I know something about him. Has he been trying the confidence game on you?"

"Oh, no; not exactly," returned Sherman, with a constrained laugh; "but I thought—"

"Next!" called out one of the barbers, as a seat was vacated.

"I'll tell you what you do," said the attorney, as Sherman rose. "After we get through here, you come with me, and I'll show you something that will settle the question at once."

Accordingly, after the scissors and razor had done their work, Sherman accompanied the officer down to Mulberry street, and entered the police headquarters. He was taken into a room where there were a number of folding-frames, each containing about two-score *cartes-de-visite*. One of these frames was handed to Sherman, and he was requested to see whether he recognized any one of the faces there.

On the first page, half way down, he found what he wished—and yet did not wish—to see; there were the regular, sharp-cut features, the curly black hair, the self-contained expression; it was Harold Blackmer beyond a doubt; and there was not a better looking rogue in all the rogue's gallery. The detective in charge gave Sherman some account of certain episodes in his friend's career; and he finally departed, a sadder and a wiser man. "You are not the first man whom the contents of that collection

has disagreeably surprised," remarked the district attorney, as he bade him farewell; "but you'll probably find it a cheaper method of getting your eyes open than a personal experience would be. How it may be in Mexico, I don't know; but if you want to find a business partner in New York, you'd better begin your search here, and work up!"

"I think I'll do without a partner for the present," replied Sherman gloomily; and he went back to his rooms, and wondered what he should say to Blackmer, in case the latter should make his appearance on Monday morning, with his trunk packed for Mexico. "I'll give him a thousand dollars and call it square!" he said to himself. But destiny had ordered the matter otherwise.

While these schemes were engendering, Fred Tyrrel was meeting with fair encouragement at his end of the line. The forenoon had passed very pleasantly in introducing the mother and daughter to each other, and in getting the former provided with raiment better suiting the station in life to which it was intended she should return. Sallie said little, and perhaps

did not as yet realize what changes were in store for her; but she was entirely docile, and tractable, and remained most of the day at the window of the little private sitting room which had been assigned to her at the Astor House, whispering softly to herself at times, but otherwise wholly undemonstrative.

Meanwhile Tyrrel was extracting from Sophie all the information she had to give. Of her father's movements she could, of course, furnish no recent news; but she described every thing that had occurred on the Wednesday evening, and retailed the conversation between Bob and herself, which fixed upon Blackmer the crime of the burglary, fruitless of result though the crime was. The whole course of events was now tolerably clear; all that remained to be discovered was the whereabouts of Parmelee, of Bob, and of the black satchel containing the money.

Concerning the latter Tyrrel had no very sanguine anticipations; he even went so far as to harbor a misgiving (which, however he did not venture to hint to Sophie) that Bob was a stool pigeon in the employ of the Blackmer

gang, and had conveyed the satchel to them as soon as Sophie had fallen asleep. In that case the thieves were probably already beyond pursuit; and there was nothing left to be done but to find John Parmelee.

But his disappearance was the greatest mystery of all. If it were true (and there seemed to be no doubt of it) that he was carried off by Blackmer, the latter's only object could have been to force him to deliver up the booty of which he was supposed to be possessed. If, however, this booty had been secured for the thieves by Bob, why was not Parmelee released? And if released, and in his right senses, why did he not report at once to the police?

The more Tyrrel reflected upon this matter, the more uneasy did he become. He could not help perceiving that Blackmer would find himself seriously embarrassed by Parmelee, and that he could not safely allow the latter his liberty until he himself was out of all danger. But Blackmer was a wholly conscienceless and unrelenting scoundrel; and what was to prevent him from finally ridding himself of all anxiety on Parmelee's account, by the simple

and horrible expedient of putting him out of existence?

It might have been of some avail, Tyrrel thought, if he could have gone to the house in which Sophie had passed the night, and given it a thorough ransacking. It was possible that Parmelee might be imprisoned there. But this project was unfortunately frustrated by Sophie's ignorance as to the direction or locality in which the house lay. She knew that it was an ugly house, and that the street leading to it was narrow and dirty; but she had taken no note of the route which she and her mother had followed in coming away from it. Nor was Sallie herself of any more assistance. The truth was that "Crazy Sal" more or less merited her title during a large part of every twenty-four hours; and this did not happen to be one of her more lucid intervals. She seemed to imagine that she was asleep, and having pleasant dreams; and, when Tyrrel endeavored to make her talk, she would gently request him not to awaken her! All he could do, therefore, was to urge his detectives to as much general activity as possible; and to

smoke an unconscionable quantity of cigars, while awaiting their bulletins.

About dusk on this day, however, came the end of all his suspense and speculations. There was a knock at the door of his room, and one of the detectives entered.

"Well, have you found him?" demanded Tyrrel.

"Well, he's been found," was the reply, "and he's now at headquarters. And that chap Blackmer, or Black Hal, is there with him!"

XXIV.

THERE is a certain obscure passageway leading, through an arched door, out of Canal street. Its uneven pavement is littered with heaps of rubbish, and the swarthy sides of the buildings on either side, rising scarce three feet apart, seem to lean toward each other as they ascend, and make the foul air stagnant.

About twenty paces down this passage, on the left hand side, there is a low doorway, flush with the wall; you might easily pass it without noticing it. But if you enter the door you will find yourself in a dark entry just wide enough for a fairly broad shouldered man to walk through.

At the end of the entry is another door. Passing this, you are in a sort of ante-room, some twelve feet square. Here sits a sullen-faced, powerfully built Mongolian, ostensibly engaged in the manufacture of baskets.

Unless you can satisfy this personage as to

the legitimate (or rather illegitimate) object of your coming, you will not be likely to proceed further. Otherwise, after receiving from you a small sum of money, he rises sluggishly, and lays his hand on a certain spot of the apparently solid wall.

A door is concealed here, however, which opens by a sliding panel, and admits you into another room, in which the devotees of the opium habit meet to indulge their vice.

Down this entry and through these doors came, late on the afternoon of Saturday, a man and a boy. After a brief confabulation with the sentry in the anteroom, they were admitted to the inner apartment.

It was about double the size of the anteroom. The ceiling was low, and the ventilation extremely defective. A series of bunks or berths were ranged round the walls, one above another. A dozen or more of them were occupied by the motionless forms of men and women, all apparently of the poorest class, and all in a more or less stupefied condition.

The smell of the place was enervating and sickening. The dim light of a single small

lamp could hardly do more than define the masses of shadow which encroached on all sides of it. Layers of thin smoke hung and swayed in the still air. There was a hideous tawdry finery in the fittings of the place, which made the squalor more obtrusive. Strips of colored tissue paper, cut in scallops, were pendent from the ceiling; the cushions and mattresses were upholstered in some kind of crimson cloth, now blackened and shiny with dirt. The one small window at the end of the room was fitted with panes of yellow, purple and red glass. The sallow and leering Chinaman who rose from the floor to receive the newcomers was clad in a caftan and trowsers of some material which might have been figured silk in the days of Confucius, but was a tissue of greasy stuff now.

Yet it was to this place that Parmelee had been conducted by his friend Bob to look for his wife; it was to this place that she, born and reared a lady, had resorted for years past to obtain the only solace left her to care about.

"She ain't here yet, boss," said Bob in an undertone, after having made a survey of the inmates: "but she won't be long a-comin'.

You'se better lie down an' take a pipe. "I'll keep a lookout in der street, and fetch her along."

"I'll wait," answered John Parmelee. "Merciful God! What a trysting spot for my love and me!"

Bob left the room and the house hastily; for although not generally squeamish, he drew the line at the stench of an opium den. But as he was passing down the passage opening into Canal street he saw a man turn the corner and advance toward him.

The man was Blackmer. Bob knew him at a glance; but a boy is not so easily recognizable as a man, and Bob, by pulling down his cap over his eyes, managed to slip by without being noticed, and the next moment was safe in Canal street.

But what was to be done?

Blackmer must have tracked them to the den, and certainly he would intend Parmelee no good. After an instant's hurried reflection, Bob formed an heroic resolution. He was constitutionally and perhaps hereditarily averse to any thing in the shape of a guardian of the

peace; nevertheless, he made up his mind to apply to the first police officer he could find and give him an alarm of murder.

But circumstances had already occurred which rendered this act of gallantry superfluous.

Four big men in dark uniforms came down Canal street, and halted at the entrance of the narrow passageway. Here one remained on guard, with his long locust staff in his hand and an aspect of complacent invincibility. The other three tramped down the passage till they came to the low doorway. Two went in, while the third remained to intercept possible fugitives.

The former traversed the entry and ascended the stairs as noiselessly as possible. Not so noiselessly, however, but that the sentry in the anteroom heard their tread and knew what it foreboded. In an instant, he slipped an iron bar across the door, and whisked into the inner room to give the alarm.

But here there was already an uproar. Two men were rolling in a fierce struggle on the floor; and the other inmates, in various stages of excitement and dismay, were sit-

ting up in their bunks, or stumbling about the room.

Outside, the police officers were thundering at the door. In a minute it gave way with a crash and they rushed in.

Simultaneously with their entrance, the proprietors vanished through the colored glass-window, like Harlequin in the pantomime. They escaped; but all the others, including Harold Blackmer and John Parmelee (the latter of whom had, by good fortune, just succeeded in pinning his antagonist down and getting on top of him) were taken into custody forthwith, and held to answer the charge of having been detected in an opium-joint.

Thus it happened that the independent enterprise of the local inspector—who knew nothing of the Tisdale bank robbery and its *dramatis personæ*, but merely aimed to get credit for general zeal and efficiency—was instrumental in bringing to a crisis a train of events which, but for him, would probably have had a very different ending.

The prisoners were marched through the streets to the police station, a dismal crew;

and a crowd of noisy and unsympathetic citizens followed them. Among the crowd was a small, red-headed boy, whom nobody noticed, but who took note of every thing. This boy hung about until the prisoners had been locked up, and he had learned that the examination was fixed for Monday; and then he quietly disappeared.

When Fred Tyrrel was informed of the arrest he poured out a glass of champagne for the detective, gave him a cigar, and then the two got into a hansom and drove down to the station house.

His immediate object was to bail out Parmelee over Sunday. But when the inspector discovered what a prize he had unwittingly got hold of, he politely but firmly declined to relinquish his grasp.

"I've no doubt of Mr. Parmelee's innocence, since you say so, Mr. Tyrrel," he remarked, "but, as a matter of official etiquette and routine, I guess we'd better keep him. He shall have our best accommodations, of course, as a first-class misdemeanant; and his friends will be allowed to visit him; but I'm afraid that's as far as I can go for you, to-night."

Finding himself constrained to accept the situation, Tyrrel next drove round to the various newspaper offices, and succeeded in making arrangements whereby Parmelee's name was kept out of the Sunday issues. Then he repaired to the residence of Ex-Senator Dumling.

The ex-senator was a lawyer of ability and influence second to none in New York. Tyrrel engaged his services for the defense; though, in order to secure his consent, he was obliged to request it as a personal favor to himself. "It's not altogether in my style, you know, my dear fellow," the great jurist remarked. However, once committed to the case, he entered into it with characteristic energy and thoroughness; and before bed-time he had interviewed Sophie and John Parmelee, and had sued out a warrant for the arrest of Blackmer on the charge of burglary. He also paid his respects to Mrs. Parmelee; but it was thought advisable not to question her in her present condition.

"What do you think of the outlook?" demanded Tyrrel, as he bade the ex-senator good night.

"Don't altogether fancy it, you know," was the reply. "Evidence good enough as far as it goes; but it wants clinching."

"What would clinch it?"

"I fancy that black satchel would be the best thing," replied the lawyer. "Only find that for me, and I shan't feel scared."

XXV.

IN spite of the care which had been taken to minimize the publicity of the case, the court-room was full when the Tisdale Bank against John Parmelee and others was called.

The evidence for the prosecution is already in possession of the reader, and need not be detailed here. Richards, the heroic deputy-constable, repeated his midnight tale of lawlessness and blood; and it was shown on other testimony that the cashier had free access to the safe at all times; that he was far from being in affluent circumstances; that on the night of the robbery, and at or about the hour of its commission, he left his house, and was not again heard of until his arrest in New York, and finally that there were no traces of any other agency than his own in the affair, and that the money had utterly disappeared. To all this Ex-Senator Dumling listened with his nose in the air, and an expression half way

between amusement and boredom; nor did he condescend to cross-examine so much as a single witness.

"This is circumstantial evidence with a vengeance!" he remarked, as if to himself, as he rose to his feet for the defense. "I intend, if it pleases the court, to show first, that John Parmelee was not the man to commit a robbery; second, that he had no need to commit it; third, that no robbery was committed by any one" (at this statement there was a sensation in the room, and the judge uncrossed his legs and sat up); "fourth, that the person who planned the robbery, and who, but for the precaution of John Parmelee, would have succeeded in his attempt, is not John Parmelee at all, but a very different individual, with whom I expect, before this case is over, to make the gentlemen on the other side much better acquainted!"

Testimony as to the cashier's unimpeached good character for thirty years was then given by Richards, by Tyrrel, and even by the venerable Mr. Pierson, the president of the bank. It was also proved that his salary was adequate

to his needs, and that his habits were regular and the reverse of extravagant. This disposed of the first two heads of the ex-senator's programme. John Parmelee was then called to testify in his own behalf.

"You will oblige me, Mr. Parmelee, by giving an account of what occurred on the afternoon and evening of Wednesday last, so far as your memory serves you," said the lawyer, in a tone indicative of kindliness and respect.

John began and told his story; how he had received a letter (produced) which he believed was written by his wife, warning him of the projected attempt; how he had decided, for certain reasons, to undertake the protection of the money himself, instead of communicating at once with the police and the directors; how he had removed it from the safe and concealed it in a certain receptacle under the floor of his sitting-room, known only to himself and his daughter; and how he had enjoined her to assume the charge of it, in case of any accident occurring to him from his expected encounter with the burglars His daughter, he added, had then gone to her room, and he was left alone.

"Well, and what happened then?" inquired Mr. Dumling, encouragingly.

"I have been an opium eater for seven years," said John, raising his pale face and confronting the assemblage, which stirred and murmured at the confession. "It has been the greatest curse of my life. I hope, with God's help, to conquer it from this time forth. But, on that night, after my little girl had gone to bed, I took a larger quantity than usual. Then, after a while, I thought I saw my wife in the room. We had been separated for ten years. I was full of joy that she had come back. I spoke to her; but she did not answer. I tried to take her into my arms, but she eluded me. She went out of the door, and I followed her. She passed out, and down the street; I pursued her, but could not overtake her. I forgot every thing but her. I did not notice in what direction I went, but only that she was before me. It was night, and then day again, and then once more night. Gradually she seemed to get further away from me; at last I saw her only by glimpses. I seemed to be among many people, who got between us and

parted us. I spoke to them, and tried to explain what I sought and hoped; but they cried out at me, and I was thrown down, and fell!"

This story was told in a manner and with a voice that held the audience silent; and when the narrator paused the subdued movement that followed testified to their attention.

The prosecuting attorney, however, wished to know, with an air of disgust, whether this sort of thing was to be regarded as evidence. "Even assuming it to be all *bona fide*," he added, "we did not come here to listen to a lunatic's account of his own lunacies."

"The test of your genuine lunatic," retorted the ex-senator suavely, "is his clinging to his delusions in the teeth of exposure. Go on, Mr. Parmelee."

John then gave the history of his kidnapping by the Blackmer gang, and of what occurred in the room where he was confined. This was listened to with earnest interest. Following it came the story of his unexpected rescue by the boy Bob, and his retreat to the shelter of the East River pier. It was all news of the raciest description to Fred Tyrrel, and

caused him to reconsider his hasty judgment of the red-headed little adventurer. But alas! What had become of him? The most searching inquiries had failed to reveal his whereabouts.

"Really," said the attorney for the prosecution, ironically, as he rose to conduct Parmelee's cross-examination, "I feel as if I had been reading a chapter from a sensational novel!" But his effort to shake the cashier's testimony met with very small success; and, after half an hour of unavailing badgering, he was fain to let him stand down.

Sophie Parmelee was next summoned to the stand; and though much of her evidence was merely confirmatory of her father's, the simplicity and quaint emphasis with which she delivered it made a strong impression. But the important part of her testimony referred to the vicissitudes of the famous black satchel. She traced its history down to the time of her falling asleep on Friday night, and there the chronicle stopped. On Saturday morning the satchel had disappeared. "But," added Sophie of her own motion, and with an earn-

estness which made every one smile, "You mustn't think that Bob took it! I like him very much, and I know that he is honest!"

The other side prudently declined to detain this witness, and Mr. Dumling called for Mrs. Parmelee. Her testimony was wanted as to the writing of the letter of warning to her husband, and the cause that led to her doing so.

Sallie entered on the arm of Fred Tyrrel. It was wonderful what a change had been wrought in her appearance by the alterations in her dress. She wore a black gown, simply made, with white muslin at her throat and black lace on her gray hair. Her face was pale and delicate, and looked neither old nor young, but had a dreamy absence of definite expression. Her dark eyes traversed the great court-room full of people with an abstracted, unseeing gaze, and she took her place in the witness box as quietly as if she were in solitude.

At her entrance, John Parmelee had started up in the dock, trembling uncontrollably; his eyes devoured her, and tears ran down his cheeks. She did not notice him at first; but when the ex-senator, in his deep voice, said:

"Mrs. Parmelee look upon the prisoner at the bar. Do you know him?" Her glance, after straying uncertainly here and there, at length settled upon her husband's face.

He stretched out his arms to her, and his voice broke in sobs: "Sallie! Sallie, my darling! I am here!"

She gazed at him, motionless, for a space of time that seemed to the spectators endless. At last, with a strange, wavering cry, which was long remembered by those who heard it, she tottered down from the stand and went to him.

No attempt was made to prevent their embrace; and, before it was ended she lay unconscious in her husband's arms. She was carried back to the waiting room, and her testimony had to be postponed.

Here ensued a pause, and no one seemed to know exactly what was to be done next. The prosecuting attorney rose and addressed himself to the judge.

"The spectacle of human emotion, and of the domestic affections, is always interesting to right-minded people," he observed; "but I don't know that they are of much assistance to

us in determining what has become of the funds of the Tisdale Bank. Does the defense propose to call any other witnesses? There has been a person described as Bob, more than once alluded to in the depositions of former witnesses, who would appear to have acted as the *deus ex machina* of the whole business. Would it be indiscreet to ask my learned friend on the other side why he does not summon him?"

The ex-senator, suppressing a growl of irritation, was about to make the most plausible retort he could think of, when he was interrupted by a commotion at the lower end of the room, from the midst of which proceeded a small but lusty voice, to the following effect:—

"Here I is, yer honor! I'se Bob, an' I got der boodle! Le'me git up der, will yer? Yer can't do nothin' without me, an' don't yer forgit it!"

This apostrophe, in the words of the newspaper report next day, fairly electrified the audience; and the impression was deepened by the red-headed urchin's deposition, given as it was with a humor that made the hearers laugh,

and at the same time with a clearness and point highly refreshing to the legal mind.

His evidence covered all the gaps in the preceding testimony, and confirmed whatever needed confirmation; and his report of what he heard and saw through the hole in the wall practically settled the question of Parmelee's innocence and Blackmer's guilt. It may be mentioned here that the latter was afterward convicted on the confession of his associates, Dick and Mike, who turned state's evidence in retaliation for Blackmer's having left them in the lurch.

"An' now," concluded Bob, handing over the black satchel to the officer, "here's yer boodle, an' precious glad I is ter git quit of it; it's weighed on me heavy, I tells yer?"

"Where has it been all this time?" his honor inquired.

"Dat's my business, jedge; I'se got my secrets," Bob replied, with an air of reserve. "I was goin' ter give it ter the little gal in der mornin', but I had ter look a'ter dat pa o' hern, an' I ain't been able ter git aroun' with der blamed old thing till jes' dis minute!"

The satchel was opened, and underneath the brush and comb and the little nightgown, the funds of the Tisdale Bank were found intact, to the last cent. This closed the examination, and John Parmelee was admitted to bail on his own recognizance.

* * * * * *

Four years have passed since the above events occurred.

Sherman left for Mexico on the morning of the day of the proceedings against Parmelee and Blackmer, and therefore without learning of his former friend's fate. He got on very well without him, and, although he no longer has so much of a monopoly of Mexican affairs as formerly, he has no complaint to bring against fortune; and probably imagines that he will soon retire from business and enjoy his leisure. It is also rumored that he is betrothed to a charming young senorita of Spanish descent, the daughter of a man eminent in the state. But the issues of life are uncertain; and it is quite possible that he may die in harness, and a bachelor.

Should you visit Tisdale now, you would

find John Parmelee to be really an old man, with white hair and beard, and a stoop in his gait. His face bears traces of deep suffering, physical and mental; but its expression is nevertheless peaceful, and not unhappy. He has conquered his evil genius; and though the struggle was severe, and left scars that time can not obliterate, the victory is final, and has left him a humble and thankful man.

His wife is not with him; that is to say, her bodily presence has been withdrawn. Sallie survived her return to the home of her youth scarcely a year. Her mind and body were both too much shattered ever to recover their former health. The drug which had been her ruin could not be wholly relinquished; but every thing was done to minimize its ill effects, and to support and cheer her in her seasons of depression. It would be difficult to say whether she fully realized her situation; certainly there were times when every thing seemed a blank to her. But, again, the sound of her husband's voice, or the sight of his face, would cause a tender gleam to come into her eyes; and Sophie never failed to awaken in her traces

of intelligence and love. The end came by imperceptible gradations; and a death like hers, so softened by affection and care, was hardly like a separation. John Parmelee probably felt that she was more really parted from him, when she was languishing, forlorn and homeless, in the slums of the great city.

Parmelee is no longer connected with the Tisdale Bank. He retired from his position as cashier on the death of his wife, receiving a handsome testimonial from the president and directors, in recognition of his long and faithful service, and in testimony of their regret for the mistaken attitude assumed toward him at the time of the supposed burglary. Parmelee now has a comfortable home at the house of Mr. Fred Tyrrel. It will be remembered that this gentleman always had the intention to provide for the cashier, whenever time or fortune should render him unable to look out for himself; but he perhaps did not foresee the manner in which this intention would be brought to pass. But the little black-eyed child, who had always been his favorite, and of whom he had always foretold good things, developed in

a manner to more than fulfill his prophecies. The sadness and loneliness of her early life deepened and sweetened a character naturally strong, faithful and magnanimous; and she grew up slender and stately, with a dark beauty peculiar to herself. A year ago, a love-match of the most unmitigated kind terminated in the marriage of Sophie Parmelee and Fred Tyrrel. So her father's home is hers, and it is a home indeed.

The Tisdale Bank profits by the services of a certain red-headed office-boy, about sixteen years of age, known to his employers and to his many friends by the name of Bob. He is clever, industrious, and in the highest degree trustworthy; and those who claim to be good judges of character, and to be able to see further than most people into a millstone, undertake to say, that, in due time, Bob will himself become cashier of the time-honored old institution which John Parmelee served so many years.

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